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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE FOR THE SOS

No 78 Dec. 2005

Bird Artists in Scotland - Martin Ridley

SMITHSONIAN
JAN 09 2006

Seeing this painting for the first time in Martin Ridley's snug studio in Comrie, Perthshire, I marvelled at the sheer activity of the scene. A myriad of House Martins gathering mud – landing, loading, flying up, twisting, turning... how could someone capture such a frenzy of action? I soon realised, in talking to Martin, that this was no moment in time seized by the artist as it happened and immediately transposed to the canvas – it was a highly organised, considered work of art which had evolved from a well-established way of working.

"Knowledge is the key" he insisted, "I paint creatures that I feel 'at one' with, through spending many hours living with them". The House Martins had enjoyed the best mud in the area due to many pails of water being carted to the site. As the weather dried up, more and more birds arrived from all the surrounding villages to cash in. Then the real work started – days of endless sketching, notes, photos and visually absorbing the changing shapes, colours and movements of the birds.

Before the actual painting starts, Martin has a routine to establish the overall composition. Experiments start with a proposed outline and involve sketch cutouts being arranged, cut again, pasted and repeatedly changed for best effect and balance. Notes and memories of the previous live scene contribute to this arranging for best reflection of the experience. Conflicting or confusing images are avoided as this can "distract the eye of the viewer" from the overall impression. When he is satisfied with the basic structure, the painting itself can now begin in the studio.

Martin was always interested in nature and from a very early age was collecting a whole variety of bits and pieces from the countryside. Sketching soon followed and as a pupil, his school classroom was always filled with bird and animal drawings. College was the next logical landmark where we see him completing the wildlife illustration course at Carmarthen in 1988 with distinction and the award of faculty, course and college student of the year. Many publications of his work followed and also exhibitions in Perthshire, Edinburgh and Vane Farm, many venues in England, and of course at the Society of Wildlife Artists in London. At the latter in 1995, he was awarded Best painting, Best Oil painting and Best Newcomer at their annual exhibition and in Gloucestershire was their seventh 'Artist in Residency' in 2005.

Passing Storm *(Martin Ridley)*

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

He has exhibited in Holland and in Wisconsin, USA, where his painting was selected for the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum - a high honour indeed! Many world painters have inspired him, notably Rien Poortvliet, Lars Jonsson and Bob Kuhn.

"Passing Storm" is a scene from his imagination, but as before, has evolved from a collection of previous experiences. The river bank, seen from a mid-river perspective, was remembered from canoeing trips in Pembrokeshire – likewise the rotting posts and reflecting water margins. The Teal are facing into the already decreasing wind as the storm passes into the distance, the dark sky still mirrored in the foreground. The oil paint used has been diluted to a creamy gouache-type smoothness and applied over a panel of MDF, already sealed with coats of mid-tone primer. Starting with a non-white base avoids glare, with solidity gained through adding paler and darker shades.

Drama over the Estuary *(Martin Ridley)*

The "storm" ingredient in "Drama over the Estuary" is quite different – here it is shared between the birds and the background. Superimposed on a blustery weather front, a flock of Lapwing has been disturbed and are flying high in their panic. The Peregrine has stooped from a great height and come in at speed to take the birds by surprise, driving upwards with one particular bird in its sights. The Lapwing is beginning a desperate escaping manoeuvre but is already doomed. Martin had witnessed many such attacks over the Severn mudflats, all of which would contribute to this end-product. Sometimes when many bird forms are involved in a painting such as this, the eventual structure just "feels right" fairly quickly – but occasionally, he senses that the subject has become too familiar and resorts to the

Stalking fox *(Martin Ridley)*

old trick of looking at a mirror-image of it – this introduces a completely fresh aspect to the picture and any weak points become more obvious.

His years of "living with" various wild animals often culminate in water-colour studies which catch the "feel" of the subject. Here the fox is caught in mid-movement as it hunts. In contrast to his work in oils, the water-colour process is fast and has to be right at the first attempt.

"Trundling Shoveler" is a calm reflective piece which is one of the results of a 4-year period where Martin used a hide in a local gravel-pit to sketch and photograph wildlife and habitat features. From this hidden watching point in a clump of rushes (accessed using waders), he observed Little Egrets and Kingfishers and the Shoveler trawling its way across the water is typical of the studies which became eventual paintings. It is a picture of "horizontal bands", the rushes, the sand spit and the softer reflections – the wake of the moving bird was achieved by drawing brushes through the wet paint surface. For this kind of result, entering a hide in the dark and waiting through the long hours of the dawn was certainly worth it, but Martin often goes on habitat-painting car trips with no particular bird in mind. In these forays, often in bad weather, he has to develop fast painting techniques to capture various landscape conditions and light qualities in the limited time available. To him, details of the background are often as important as the bird/animal subject itself.

The last painting, "Coming home" is another imaginary scene, but evolves directly from a real experience. Following his wedding in Pitlochry, Martin and his new wife decided to climb the nearby Ben Vrackie. After an ascent in miserable rain and low visibility, the

Coming home *(Martin Ridley)*

summit was eventually reached; but instead of having no view from the top, the clouds parted to allow the sun through, revealing breathtaking glimpses of the landscape below. The unexpected perspective, as well as having a romantic context, entered the memory banks and emerged later as this unique setting for a skein of migrating Pinkfeet.

Trundling Shoveler *(Martin Ridley)*

Martin has lived in Scotland now for four years and is "definitely staying". After weeks of back-breaking work, he has now completed a fine reconstruction of his cottage in the beautiful village surrounds of Comrie and hopes with his wife Jill (and dog Skip) to welcome B&B visitors after the New Year. While still retaining many of his customers down south, he is now enjoying a healthy sales uptake of his paintings here in Scotland – we look forward to seeing many more examples from this most talented artist in the years to come.

Jimmy Maxwell

(Find out more about Martin Ridley and view his work at: *www.martinridley.com*)

Martin in his local woodland *(Lang Stewart)*

Scottish Bird News No 78 December 2005

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 31st January 2006 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

Designed by
Harry Scott, Pica Design, Aboyne

Printed by
Meigle Colour Printers Ltd, Galashiels

NEWS & NOTICES

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the club: **Ayrshire:** Mr P P McEwan, Mr R A Stakim. **Borders:** Mr J Curran, Dr A D Davies, Mr & Mrs A Pringle. **Caithness:** Mr R J Schmedlin. **Central Scotland:** Mrs J Fulton, Mr M Given, Dr K Wilkinson. **Clyde:** Mr I A Cowe, Ms M Higgins, Mr J Miller, Mr G J Thursby. **Dumfries:** Mr A Bowman, Mr J Mills, Mr & Mrs J Threlfall. **England, Wales & NI:** Mr & Mrs P Dalloway, Mr M W Ewart, Mr B S Hunt, Mr A Jackson, Mr J S P Lumby, Mrs D M S Moore, Mr K Mullins, Mr & Mrs S Scott, Mr A H Smith, Mr R D Sutton, Mr S G Tebbutt, Mr J D Ward, Mr R K White, Mr D R Willett. **Fife:** Mr P Bartlett, Mr J Forster. **Grampian:** Mr D Parnaby. **Highland:** Ms Y M Brown, Mrs E M Rice. **Lothian:** Mr & Mrs M Adams, Mr & Mrs A R Aitken, Mr G Anderson, Mr A C Barton, Elliott Bruce & family, Mr & Mrs P Bryce, Mr & Mrs T L Burns, Mrs E & Mr H Butterworth, Mr & Mrs R Charles, Prof & Mrs K Cornwell, Mr & Mrs N K Cowern, Mr A P Cruikshank, Mrs S Cunningham, Mr & Mrs T Cunningham, Mr & Mrs P Cuthbertson, Mr R Dalrymple, Mrs M R & Mr D Doran, Mr B Hickman, Ms T Hutchinson, Mr R Irvine, Mr & Mrs P B Jackson, Mr & Mrs B Langan-Fortune & family, Mrs M Lindsay, Mr & Mrs T Linton, Mr & Mrs D Longmuir, Dr M Lorge, Mr A D & V McAdam, Mr & Mrs M G McKenzie, Mr P Middleton, Mrs A M Mitchell, Mr A Neustein, Ms J Newcombe, Mrs G & M Pearey, Mr A A Riding, Mr D Robertson, Mr & Mrs K Sinclair, C Smith & D Kelly, Mr & Mrs P C Taylor, Mr & Mrs L Thomas, Mr M Till, Mr & Mrs J Watson. **Orkney:** Mr R E Matson. **Overseas:** Mr S Rae. **Stewartry:** Mr A C Goadby.

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are –
August: 1st £30: Dr. K. Halliday, 2nd £20: Stan Howe, 3rd £10: Mrs. A. Inglis.
September: 1st £30: J.C.Jackson, 2nd £20: Dr. R. Hissett, 3rd £10: B.S.Smith.
October: 1st £30: G.C.Shepherd, 2nd £20: Mrs. D. Melrose, 3rd £10: Mrs. P.E.M.Young.

New members are always welcome. They must be SOC members and over 18. Please contact Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

STOP PRESS - Donald Watson

As we went to press we were very sorry to hear that our Honorary President, Donald Watson, had died. A full appreciation will appear in due course.

Presentation

A special book presentation was made to Ron Forrester after the Newtonmore SOC Conference Dinner, in recognition of his outstanding 19 years service as Secretary to the Scottish Birds Records Committee. He was roundly applauded for this marathon stint.

This very active Committee assesses birds records from within Scotland and maintains the official Scottish Bird List for the benefit of all Scottish birdwatchers. Ron's steadfast attention to detail and undisputed efficiency has been well respected by the many people who have come into contact with him. Although he stood down at the end of March 2005, he certainly cannot put his feet up to relax as he is one of the lead editors for the new *Birds of Scotland 3*, which involves another huge amount of voluntary work.

David Clugston

Scotland joins The 500 Club

– a celebration of Scotland's birds

Looking at a globe, the uninitiated might expect a country lying on the same latitude as Hudson Bay and Moscow to have a pretty barren avifauna – how wrong could you be when that place is Scotland. Lying on the edge of a great continent, Europe, it benefits from the ameliorating climate resulting from being in the eastern Atlantic, particularly through the warming effects of the Gulf Stream. It also profits from being a wind-torn rain-swept land at the extreme western limit of the Palearctic zoogeographic region and a migration crossroads.

When one thinks about bird-rich European countries, most people might be drawn to consider the southern gems such as Spain, France or Greece, perhaps the eastern delights such as Romania, Bulgaria or Poland or the northern pinewoods of Finland, Norway or Sweden. It may be surprising for many to learn that a small country like Scotland actually stands up exceedingly well in comparison with the larger 'bird paradises' of southern Europe and has a considerably larger species list than any country in either Scandinavia or eastern Europe. In fact Scotland has just become only the fifth European member of an exclusive society, 'The 500 Club'. The *Scottish List* has just reached that magical milestone, a list of 500 species, with the recent separation of the American Black Scoter from 'our' Common Scoter. This is a major achievement for a country the size of ours. In fact Scotland is significantly smaller than the other countries to have reached this landmark with an area of only 79,000 km^2, compared with 547,000 km^2 in France, 505,000 km^2 in Spain, 301,000 km^2 in Italy

and 130,000 km^2 in England. So forget about southern and eastern Europe - we really should be acclaiming Scotland as the true birding hot spot of Europe.

As Scotland reaches this important landmark, there will soon be a celebration of this wonderfully diverse avifauna, as the arrival of *BS3* gets ever closer. As a successor to Baxter and Rintoul's '*The Birds of Scotland*' and Valerie Thom's '*Birds in Scotland*', the new book is being informally referred to as '*BS3*' and will be called '*The Birds of Scotland*'.

BS3 is a huge project that continues to grow. As the workload has increased, so has the editorial team. We now have ten members all 'beavering' away. With work now received from over 150 authors, and many more Scottish birdwatchers being consulted on particular aspects of the book, this is a mammoth team project.

The SOC Council have now agreed that the book should be produced in two volumes and that the Club should publish it 'in-house'. Whilst there may be a degree of financial risk involved, the benefits, increased editorial control and potential increased profits for the Club, are significant. With profits going to a fund to assist future publications, it is important that profits are realised, but at the same time sponsorship is being obtained, aimed at keeping the sales price as low as possible.

'*The Birds of Scotland*' will be:

- Well over 1,000 pages in two A4 sized volumes.
- The most important book ever published on Scottish natural history.
- The largest and most authoritative bird book on any region of Britain.
- Written by over 150 specialist authors, under the guidance of ten editors.
- Not just a book for the amateur but a conservation and research tool for the professional.
- An inventory of all key facts about the birds of Scotland.
- The largest and best collection of Scottish bird photographs ever published.

As well as a book for birdwatchers, it will also clearly highlight areas where future research is required and indicate where conservation measures are necessary. This will be a book that no serious Scottish ornithologist or casual birder would want to be without and will be viewed as an essential acquisition for anyone interested in birds and birdwatching in Scotland.

Probably the most important part of the book will be the 500 species accounts. With most bird books, one or two people write it all. We have acknowledged that there is no one person in Scotland who is an expert on all 500 species, therefore the editorial team have tried to find the person who knows the most about each individual species in Scotland and have invited that person to write the account. There are some species about which clearly nobody can be described as 'an expert', but we have always found someone who can write with experience and authority. As a result there are a total of over 150 species authors, the vast majority having particular knowledge of the bird or birds, about which they have written. The editorial process is such that each and every species account has then undergone a rigorous editorial process, with as a minimum, all ten members of the editorial team examining the text in detail, but where appropriate, additional 'experts' being consulted. We therefore believe that we have assembled an exceedingly authoritative and readable text.

A very large number of photographs have been assembled, taken by many of the countries leading wildlife photographers. Around 500 photographs will be included in the book and it is clear that even without the text, this will become an outstanding collection that many people will want to own.

With much of the introductory chapters and all but a handful of species accounts now written, the majority now at an advanced stage of the editorial process, the book is taking shape and publication remains on schedule for 2007. Mock-ups have now been produced for seven sample species and the entire editorial team are of the view that when finished, it will be even better that we had envisaged.

A major sales drive will take place during the winter 2006/07 and all Club members will have an opportunity to benefit from a prepublication offer to be announced in due course. We very much hope that Club members will take full advantage of buying not only a copy for themselves but also additional copies for friends and family alike.

Ron Forrester

North Rona, Sula Sgeir in 2005

In 2003 and again in 2004, small groups of SOC members enjoyed successful trips to the remotest of the Western Isles, with Bob Theakston on '*Poplar Voyager*' (*SBN* 69 & 74) and this year was no exception. Sailing from Kinlochbervie in early May, our first call was at North Rona, where we anchored overnight to ensure a visit to this, the most atmospheric of Scotlands Leach's petrel colonies. After a further day ashore we made for nearby Sula Sgeir. It is rarely advisable to land here after mid May, when it becomes impossible to move around without causing major disturbance and egg loss to the dense assemblage of nesting seabirds. However, the lack of Guillemots on the cliffs made it clear that egg-laying had barely started. Our two hours ashore was nevertheless restricted to a cautious, single file exploration of the bothy area, which lies well outside the limits of the gannetry and only requires negotiation with a few territorial Fulmars. Away from the bothies, our brief stay ashore was spent on the barren and bird-free northern tip of the rock.

Arthur Grosset & Stuart Murray

We have arranged 3, week long trips in 2006. Sailing from Kinlochbervie to North Rona and Sula Sgeir on 12 May and again on 19 May. From Oban on 17 June our itinerary will include an overnight at the European Storm Petrel colonies on the Treshnish Islands. For more information and bookings contact Bob Theakston at bob@poplar-voyager.com or phone 07831 270892.

On Sula Sgeir *(Stuart Murray)*

SOC Conference

November 2005

Once again, the Balavil hotel was the venue for our SOC Conference and AGM, on Oct. 28–30. As usual, the organising committee and SOC staff shared all the hard work and its success is due to their efforts. This report is a combined write-up by editor Jimmy Maxwell ably assisted by Alistair Duncan, Campbell McLellan, John Reid, Brian Smith and Duncan Watt.

Friday night

Our speaker for the evening was Vice President, Janet Crummy. The back–up team, comprising Carol James on Audio and Ian Andrews & Paul Speak on Visuals, swung into action – a good workout in preparation for the following day. Our journey to find "Birds across the Continent" was about to start.

Janet - New President *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Janet Crummy
– a Trip down the Chilean Fjords

This was an illustrated account of a 4-day coastal journey by ferry down the western seaboard of Chile. Views of the Amazon and the incredible Andes led us into a whole series of spectacular shots of the rugged snow-capped mountainous coast and islands. In pristine weather, the party of four encountered Kelp Gulls, the flightless marine Steamer Ducks and a flock of Southern Terns nesting on the old wreck of a sugar transporter (shades of the Clyde!).

Near Puerto Natales a local colony of Imperial Shags and King Cormorants was visited with local Crested Caracaras scavenging nearby. Exploratory trips into the vast Torres del Paines National Park produced immense mountain peaks and glaciers with the famous Condor and close encounters with llama-like Guanacos (not too close or you encounter their "spit" as well!)

Coastal sea-trips brought icebergs – wondrous shades of blue and fantastically-shaped - the birds varying from the huge Rea to the minute (but generously named) Cinnamon-bellied Ground Tyrant. A riding experience with the Gauchos, enjoyable but crippling, nevertheless produced Geese(Andean, Upland and Ashy-headed), the beautiful Buff-breasted Ibis and the amazing Austral Parakeets.

A trip with a difference and a great starter for the Conference.

The SOC Bird-brain Quiz (now an annual feature) followed in the bar. Again Brian Smith held court. This time he had contributed the questions himself and soon the audience, arranged in table groups, were struggling to answer a varied list of teasers, some academic, some much less so! After much loud argument and baiting of our patient question master, the "Hogg" table carried off the prize. Easily the most relaxed and enjoyable bit of the weekend.

Saturday morning

This year, Ian Thomson inaugurated the idea of a Bird Race. Actually everyone did the same bird-watching trips as before but this time returned to a time deadline and counted up their species seen. This idea gave a bit more focus to the morning and the weather stayed quite reasonable. A Pectoral Sandpiper stake-out attracted some to a small lochan near Tromie Bridge – a Common Swift was seen over Loch Insh and both Crested Tit and Crossbills were counted. Yet again, Angus Hogg and party triumphed with 52 species (75 all told) and it will be interesting to see how this varies from year to year.

Saturday afternoon

Mark Holling, President, officially welcomed everyone and after some announcements, the platform lectures began.

David Parkin – Bird Migration, Genetics and Climate Change

What an excellent start to Saturday's programme. From Gilbert White and the myth of Swallows overwintering in mud, through to natural selection changing the genetic structure of our favourite migrants as we study them.

David Parkin *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

White's own brother based in Gibraltar realised that he was watching Barn Swallows heading south in autumn and refuted the Swallow story. David moved on to reveal the ringing and observational studies of Perdeck in the 1950s and the monumental work of Peter Berjhold who studied wild born Blackcaps from Scandinavia, S. Germany, France and the Canary Isles to assess migrational desire in autumn. Berjhold showed that not only were there differences in geographical orientation between races but that F1 hybrids between races showed intermediate behaviour.

Short-term evolution was illustrated by ringing data of German Blackcaps that were on the western fringe of normal migration orientation. In the past they died, but with garden feeding, including the planting of berry-bearing shrubs in UK, some birds survived. Now we have strong evidence of the success of those birds and the progeny changing the migration orientation of German Blackcaps - the evolution of a new sub-species.

David then discussed the possible effects of global warming. Wintering areas will move north, with Mallard and Pintail no longer needing to winter in UK. There will be benefits to relatively short distance migrants compared with their longer distance "cousins". Not only Blackcaps compared with Garden Warblers but also Pied Flycatchers compared with Spotted Flycatchers. Return dates in spring already indicate these trends which are evidence of natural selection changing the genetic structure of some species.

Brian Smith

Raymond Duncan
– The 2004/2005 Waxwing Invasion

In his introduction Raymond explained that Waxwings breed in the remote pine forests of northern Scandanavia and Russia, with their main food being Rowan berries. Should there be a shortage of this food source post-breeding, then the birds are forced to migrate, as they did to the UK in the largest numbers ever recorded from late October 2004 on. The numbers seen in the Aberdeen area in 2004 compared with those seen during the 1990 irruption, showed increases of up to 30 times in rural and suburban locations but less dramatic ones in the city centre. As an example, Kincorth had 1800 birds in 2004 as opposed to 74 in 1990. Numbers peaked at 3000 in November. As in 1990, netted birds were colour-ringed in an attempt to follow their subsequent movements. Almost 25 percent of ringed birds were re-sighted, some on a number of occasions. The furthest travelled bird was a young female ringed on 30 October

Raymond Duncan toasting the Waxwings (Jimmy Maxwell)

and then seen in Wadensea in the Netherlands on 9 November. By mid-December, birds had been reported in Northern England and even Wales. In 1990 the birds had congregated in NE England but by the middle of January 2005, Waxwings had continued to move south, reaching the south coast by the end of the month. Birds were reported in Ireland in February showing that pressure of numbers in 2004/2005 had resulted in a much greater movement than in 1990.

John Reid

Before Tea and Coffee, Daphne Peirse-Duncombe officiated at the 200 Club draw – assisted as usual by Vicky McLellan. The audience duly showed their appreciation for all her ongoing work - since the club started she has raised £15,500 in clear profit for the SOC and £15,500 of prizes has gone to lucky members. Then time to take a quick look at the upstairs display of books from Subbuteo, the SOC second hand book bargains, Second Nature collectors' items and some instruments displayed by Charles Frank Optics. Soon it was time for our last speaker of the afternoon.

Sam Alexander
– Birding around North America

Sam Alexander possibly demonstrated the results of Zugenruhe in Homosapiens. We have all felt that jitteriness that comes with the urge to travel! Sam took us on a vagrancy across N. America from Alaska's Auklet to Mount McKinley with impeccable photography, his constant sense of humour illuminating us to the unexpected sights such as Dwarf Lupin and Muskoxen - he is a wayfarer who takes time to wait along the way to see those things that over-busy travellers so often miss! The waders at Churchill, all so unique, yet he took time to make his photographs deliver many helpful identification points to us.

I certainly enjoyed the "Ah..." response to the Least Chipmunk picture - he told me that he had included some of these "Ah" type of pictures for "the non-birders, Duncan". Very kind of course, but I think that's only an excuse for being a gentle-hearted rugged explorer who likes to hear an audience go "Ah..."

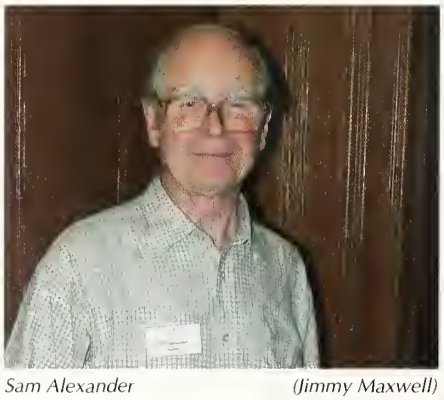
Yosemite for Stellars Jay, a Great Grey Owl up close, then off to Monteray Bay in California... Texas... Whooping Cranes..., Attwater for Prairie chicken... Zoom to Florida, am I getting lost? No, I'm sure the Burrowing Owl is at Cape Coral and the Limpkin is at Corkscrew Swamp, but that Hump-backed Whale waving good-bye was never in the lagoons of Ding Darling Reserve! We must take another trip with Sam to somewhere!

Duncan Watt

The 69th Annual AGM of the SOC

Mark Holling, President, started with the Annual Report for 2004–5. He explained the establishment of the holding company, SOC Enterprises Ltd. and the relationship with the SOC itself. There had been an increase in membership and the SOC policy to encourage alliances had progressed with the signing of the Forest Enterprise Concordat. Dick Vernon underlined various items including the set up of SOC-EL and its implications regarding VAT. He apologised for the year's accounts only being presented to members at the time of the Conference, thus giving them only minimal time for perusal. He placed the blame for this squarely on our Auditors for continual delays which made impossible the usual placing of accounts in the normal September mailing. A proposal that an EGM be held after the March Conference to approve the accounts was agreed, and also that the problems regarding the Auditors would receive appropriate investigation and treatment.

Mark described the events build-up to the opening of Waterston House and emphasised the huge role played by volunteers in this. He then moved to the non-renewal of our Development Manager, Bill Gardner's contract. During his explanations for this decision, there were increasing interruptions from the floor with some members clearly unhappy with the drastic action and the speed and manner with which it was taken. During the following interchange between the 'fors' and 'againsts' of this decision, there was always unanimous agreement in the room on the immense contribution of Bill to the creation of Waterston House. Our President and Treasurer responded to those speaking against the decision, some quite vitriolic, with calmness and an evident willingness to explain the financial and contractual complications of the matter which necessitated the swift decision and action. Many members with close contact with Bill, including council members, backed the decision and gave appropriate reasons for this.



Sam Alexander (Jimmy Maxwell)

With time fast running out, a very lengthy, prepared statement was duly intoned by David Merrie, proposing that there should be a vote of "no confidence" in the Management Committee who had initially proposed the decision. The members were made aware from the Chair that if carried, this proposal would lead to the dismissal of that Committee and the consequent disruption of Council, all having been elected by the members themselves. A vote was taken and the proposal defeated.

The AGM concluded with the election of Janet Crummy as President, Chris Waltho as Vice President, Mike Martin as Honorary Secretary and Vicky McLellan as the new Council member to replace Andy Thorpe. Acknowledgement was made for Andy's long contribution as a Council member and Mark's able two years as President.

Saturday night

Due to the extended AGM, the Conference Dinner had to be delayed. All credit is due to the hotel staff that had to convert the space for dining and somehow re-schedule the meal. A presentation was made by our new President to the Hotel Manager who is taking a year out to visit various places around the world. He was thanked for ongoing helpfulness over all the years and we congratulate him as well for the superb dinner which followed. Following this, instead of the usual speech, Janet Crummy entertained us with a humorous little poem – she also made another presentation, this time to Ron Forrester, retiring secretary to the SBRC (Scottish Birds Records Committee) (see separate note). A blast of country dance music from the floor announced the end of the dinner and reminded us of the evening's conviviality to come.

Sunday morning

Breakfast and straight into a full morning of lectures...

Bill Quantrill – the African Bird Club – What it is, and what it does

The African Bird Club still maintains that pioneering spirit! Always the possibility of a new species for science or a new location for one already known. Bill Quantrill, a founder member of the 'ABC', is of course a Nubiphile - the most telling image shown was perhaps the first, which illustrated all the other continents fitting inside the map of Africa with room to spare! There is a saying that "Everything in Africa bites; the Mosquitoes bite, the Lions bite, the Vultures also bite but it is Africa herself that bites best, for once she has bitten you, she will never let go!"

Bill Quantrill and "that shirt" (Jimmy Maxwell)

The enthusiasm of the members of this sister Club of ours is quite engaging because in a sense we in the SOC could learn a lot from them. The distribution of the ABC Bulletin, the interlinking of their website, the Conservation Projects, the success of the Seychelles Magpie Robin through their intervention - and "Supported Membership". Now, there is an interesting idea from a Club with very clear aims and objectives! I am not referring to the possibilities of record lists which Africa offers to visiting birders, the Kenya 700 or the remarkable 342 species in a day - by helicopter! Well done Terry Stevenson! The 200 words Jimmy Maxwell asked for has turned out a sideways glance at ourselves stimulated by a brilliant presentation by Bill Quantrill.

Duncan Watt

Ernest Garcia – Raptor Migration at the Strait of Gibraltar

Ernest started by explaining the geography of the Strait, which is only 10 miles wide at its narrowest point, and the wedge shape of the Rock itself, which acts as a landmark and also provides lift from updrafts. Two aerial views showed these features very clearly. Migrating raptors take 30 to 45 minutes to cross the Strait with the route chosen dependent on the prevailing wind direction. If westerly, the birds cross in the direction of the rock but if easterly, they cross further west in the Tarifa area. It is important, particularly for the larger raptors, not to be over the open sea as there is the risk of drowning. Raptor migration has been

Ernest Garcia relaxes after Gibraltar (Jimmy Maxwell)

studied at Gibraltar for 40 years and so a significant amount of data has been accumulated. A large variety of raptors crosses the Strait including kites, vultures, eagles, harriers, hawks and falcons with the most numerous being the Honey Buzzard. In all, 33 species have been recorded of which 5 are vagrants. In trying to assess how the numbers of migrating raptors have changed over time, Ernest presented figures for spring mean raptor passage rates, which showed a fall of 50 percent in Honey Buzzard numbers, an increase of 170 percent for Black Kite and small increases for Short-toed Eagle, Marsh Harrier and Booted Eagle. Common Buzzard numbers have fallen to such an extent that it can now be suggested that they do not migrate out of Europe. In addition, the range extension of some African species, eg Ruppell's Vulture into Spain, indicates migration changes similar to that mentioned in Dr Parkin's presentation.

John Reid

Hugh Insley – The Use of Ringing for Conservation across the World

In North America the Red Knot breeds in the Canadian Arctic and migrates to South America. The birds pass through Delaware Bay feeding on the eggs of the Horse Shoe Crab, a creature that Filipino fishermen had been annually harvesting for bait. As the Horse Shoe Crab eggs are a vital food source for the migrating waders, Hugh and his team, working with the American Fish and Wildlife Service, went out there to ring the birds in order to trace their migration movements. Fortunately, the harvesting of the Horse Shoe crabs has now been stopped.

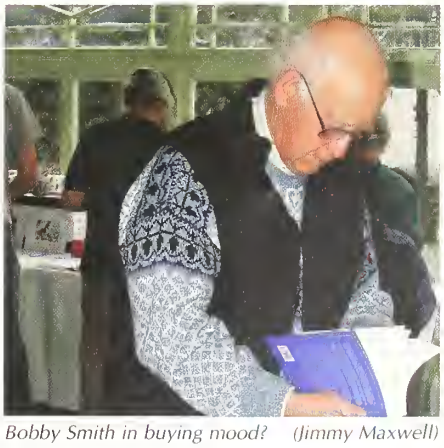
On the Asia to Australia flyway, waders feed at the estuary of a river in South Korea before migrating down to Broome Bay in N.W.Australia. The estuary is threatened by development so Hugh's group went to this area to ring some of the waders there.

In both these areas, if the food sources for the birds were destroyed, the birds would not survive their migration journeys. Hugh gave a great, well-illustrated talk where he described exciting and valuable work involving really impressive numbers of waders and showed all the ingenious methods for catching them on the shores. Everyone enjoyed his delightful pictures of birds such as the legendary Spoonbill Sandpiper.

Bobby Smith – Icebergs, Penguins and Old Stinkers

For the final talk at the Conference, Bobby took us on a cruise through the Antarctic. He sailed from Ushuaia in South Argentina and gave a vivid description of penetrating into southern latitudes. As is his custom, he illustrated the voyage with some splendid wildlife photography. Why do Bobby's photographs always appear to contain "personalities and characters"? His King Penguins move majestically and his 'Chinstraps' smile charmingly at the observer. No cold objective statistics here but a very close and keen observation of behaviour, posture and jizz. Yet he achieves this without ever descending into the soppily anthropomorphic. Long will I remember the extensive field of discarded feathers and plumage; the mist and spray-covered shots of an island impossible to land on. We were treated to a catalogue of penguins, pinnipeds and seabirds, all against a dramatic background of icebergs. But what were these mysterious "old stinkers" in the title? - perhaps some lesser known volcanic or geological phenomenon of the region? - perhaps a throwback to the whaling industry and its ensuing dereliction amply illustrated? No! - it was the bad breath of the Southern Elephant Seal! How close can a wildlife interest be?

Campbell McLellan



Bobby Smith in buying mood? (Jimmy Maxwell)

To round off the Conference, the Raffle (operated by Janet Crummy and Carol James) was drawn – it made over £200 in all. Janet thanked all who had contributed to the weekend, especially the guest speakers who had truly transported us through their knowledge and experience of "Birds across the Continents". Sunshine at last appeared to warm our departure and promised a homeward journey for all through the glorious autumn colours.

Jimmy Maxwell

Mr Fisher & Mr Peterson

Greater Black-backed Gull (Jimmy Maxwell)

Another article in our series on early ornithologists in Scotland.

In July 1952, at the age of 16, I was on a family holiday in Ullapool, Wester Ross. I had long been interested in birdwatching, having joined the Glasgow branch of the SOC the year before, and having, like many boys of my generation, a small collection of birds' eggs! My father, always interested in exploring the smaller uninhabited islands off the West coast, enquired along the waterfront in Ullapool about the prospect of a visit to the Summer Isles, and Mr Willie McRae, a local boatman, said that he was taking two birdwatchers out the following day and he would enquire whether we could go along with them. There was a positive response to this request and the next morning father and I were introduced to Mr Fisher and Mr Peterson on our way out to Glas Leac Beag, one of the outermost and smallest of the Summer Isles which lie at the mouth of Loch Broom. It was with a sense of awe that I realised that this was none other than the famous James Fisher, whose series of Pelican books *Bird Recognition* I had with me and which were the best pocket bird books of the day. I had not heard of Roger Tory Peterson at that time, but he was of course to become a household name among birdwatchers in Britain after the publication of his *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe*. It transpired that these two gentlemen were exploring the North West coast of Scotland to gather data for the future publication of the Field Guide which was then in preparation.

The reason for visiting Glas Leac Beag was to assess the colony of Greater Black-Backed Gulls there, and during our time ashore I was allowed to assist in the ringing of 26 half grown chicks. One other bird of note was a summering Barnacle Goose which, being flightless, swam off the island as we approached. We had a picnic in warm sunshine before returning to Ullapool and during the journey our charming hosts invited us to visit Handa with them later in the week.

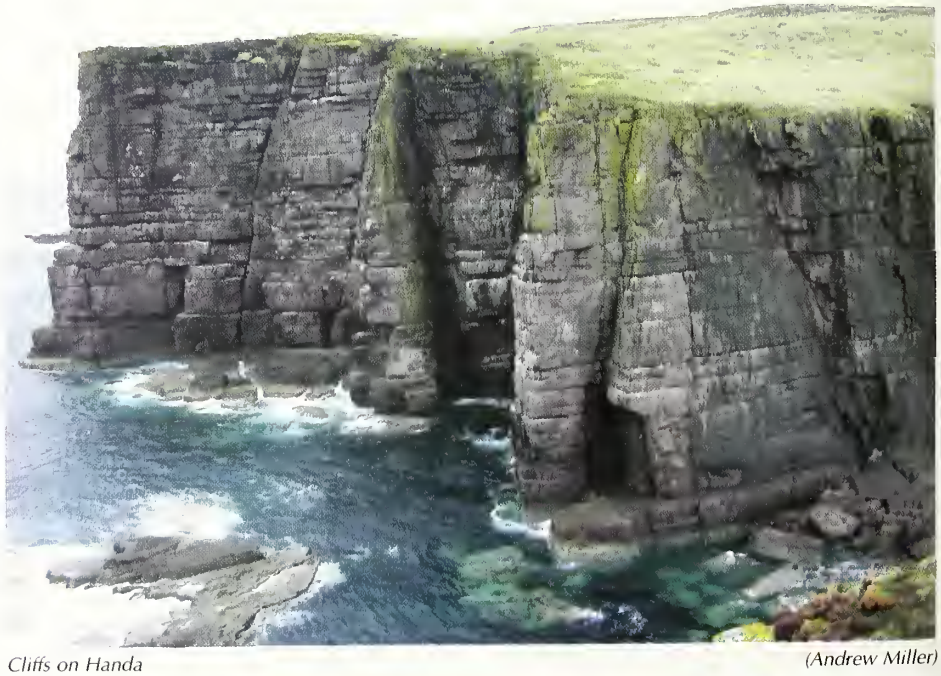
The following day, father and I with my younger sister set off for Scourie along the narrow twisting road which for the last twenty miles or so had just a gravel surface. At Kylesku we found that the ferry, a small ex WD landing craft with room for only one car, had broken down, so we pitched our tent in expectation of an overnight delay. However, the ferry sprang to life some hours later and hurriedly striking camp, we completed our journey before nightfall.

Next morning dawned calm but with dense fog, however James Fisher arranged for a local boatman to take us out and we were soon landing on Handa's sandy shore. The island was uninhabited of course, as this was long before its designation as a Nature Reserve, so we had the place to ourselves as we tramped steadily uphill across the moor, still unable to see much because of the mist. Suddenly the noise and smell of the vast seabird colony assailed our senses and right on cue the sun broke through, dispersing the mist just as we reached the cliff edge opposite the Great Stack. It was (and still is) a wonderful sight, the massed ranks of Guillemots the most obvious, but so many other seabirds swirling around, a sight never to be forgotten. The ornithologists busied themselves with a Fulmar count and with noting the percentage of bridled Guillemots on the nesting ledges, before we had our picnic resting on the turf opposite the Stack.

One incident sticks in my memory - two large long-necked birds flew swiftly over uttering a rapid quacking call. Peterson saw me watching them and when he realised that I had no idea what they were, said with a smile, "Red Throated Divers", the first I had ever seen. To this day, the Rain Goose, as it is known here in Shetland, is one of my favourite birds.

So ended two wonderful days, among the best I have experienced in a lifetime of birdwatching. What struck me then, and what I still think of as remarkable, was that two of the world's most eminent ornithologists should have welcomed a 16 year old stranger into their company. Nothing was too much trouble for them; they showed us some wonderful sights and answered all of our questions with great patience. Truly, Mr Fisher and Mr Peterson were gentlemen in every respect as well as being at the very peak of their profession.

Ramsay Napier



Cliffs on Handa *(Andrew Miller)*

Spring migration of Purple Sandpipers through Iceland

It was 9 pm on the 22 May on the southwest coast of Iceland. Uncharacteristically, the small flock of Purple Sandpipers flushed easily. What's more, instead of flying out low over the water and returning to land on a nearby rock, the nine birds started towering up into the cloudless sky, heading west over the Denmark Strait. There was no change in their steady climb and direction, and they were soon lost to sight. Their next landfall would be Greenland where they would probably cross the ice cap to west Greenland and perhaps onwards to Canada.

All around, there were plump waders (Turnstones, Knots, Sanderlings, Dunlins and Purple Sandpipers) resplendent in fresh breeding plumage and ready to depart for their breeding areas in northern Greenland or the Arctic islands of Canada. Many were starting to call and display, as if they were already on the breeding grounds. In the case of most of these waders, the migrations are now well understood. The same cannot be said for the Purple Sandpiper. This is the species that members of the Highland Ringing Group had come to Iceland to study.

We joined forces with a local ornithologist, Gunnar Pór Hallgrímsson, to try to find out more about the migration of Purple Sandpipers through Iceland. Two of us had made an initial trip in 2003, and our trip in 2005 aimed to build on the first one. We already knew from studies by the Grampian and Tay Ringing Groups that most Purple Sandpipers wintering in eastern Britain go east to breed in the mountains of Norway. However, the bulk of the British wintering population, found mainly in Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and northern Scotland, is characterized by birds with long bills, and these are believed to travel northwest to Iceland to refuel and then migrate onwards to either Greenland or maybe Canada. The aim of our visit was to catch these birds to describe their pattern of fattening, and by individually colour- ringing them, to obtain sightings, either in the Arctic, back in Iceland on migration or wintering in northwest Europe.

Most of our time was spent on the Reykjanes peninsula, which juts out on the southwest coast, providing an excellent jumping off point for waders heading west to Greenland and Canada. Unlike some of the other west coast peninsulas, the Reykjanes peninsula is a low-lying lava plain so has wide inter-tidal zones for waders to feed in. In addition, there are many bays where broken seaweed is trapped and accumulates on the high water mark. These piles of rotting weed provide a feeding habitat at all stages of the tide, and given the short nights in Iceland during May, waders can feed for almost 24 hours. The main food in the weed banks is maggots of Kelp Flies. Turnstones push the fronds of weed to expose the maggots while Purple Sandpipers, Dunlins, Knots and Sanderlings peck and probe amongst the weed. At the same time, Eiders feed at the tide edge where the waves disturb the weed banks.

During our 2005 visit, we stayed at the Sandgerdi Marine Centre in a small fishing village. Our dining room overlooked the harbour, so we could see the coming and goings of fishing boats accompanied by throngs of gulls – mainly Lesser Black-backed and fewer Herring, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls. Meanwhile the smells from the processing factories were a constant reminder of Iceland's dependence on fish.

The Marine Centre was well sited for our study because Purple Sandpipers were abundant to the north and south of the village. We made most our catches using a cannon net, particularly on the rotting weed banks. Because the waders used the high tide weed banks at low tide, as well as at high, we were able to catch at any stage of tide. One of the catching sites we used was a coastal farm (Hafurbjarnarstadir) where the previous farmer had been a keen wader ringer. During the 1950s, he trapped over a thousand Purple Sandpipers using horse-hair nooses and "walk-in" traps, and two of these were recovered in Newfoundland and Baffin Island. With our catches now totalling over 300 Purple Sandpipers, it seemed unlikely that we would be able to emulate his success. However, by colour-ringing the birds, our chances of recoveries and re-sightings were enhanced. This proved to be the case because birds we had marked in 2003 have been seen in winter and spring in Belgium, Cornwall, Yorkshire, Aberdeenshire, Caithness and Orkney. We also had the good fortune to catch a bird that had already been ringed by the Highland Ringing Group in East Ross-shire. There had been only one previous ringing record linking Britain (Orkney) with Iceland, so we had clearly improved our knowledge about where these migrants were coming from.

It was during one of our late evening catches that we were suddenly aware of a raptor chasing the waders. Although the Merlin is a common raptor in Iceland, Gunnar instantly recognized it as a Hobby – only the twelfth record for Iceland. It hung around for the next few days, giving waders

Gunnar and Brian discussing the setting of the cannon net (on sacking to stop it snagging with weed) at Gardskagaviti (Ron Summers)

moments of panic and Icelandic twitchers the run around. Our only other departure from wader-catching was a visit to see the local Black Duck (an American visitor), which had paired up with a Mallard and remained on a pond for many years.

It was clear that most waders were fat and therefore preparing for onward migration. They were visibly fat, particularly in the nether regions and this was confirmed when we weighed captured birds. By the third week in May, male Purple Sandpipers (the smaller sex) were, on average, 83 g and females 100 g, well above their winter masses. Wing and bill measurements matched our measurements from northern Scotland, confirming that the majority of the Purple Sandpipers were migrants from northwest Europe, rather than Icelandic Purple Sandpipers. By late May, most local Purple Sandpipers are on the breeding grounds inland.

All the Purple Sandpipers were colour-ringed, with rings above and below the tarsus joint. When the flocks of Purple Sandpipers arrive back in Britain, please keep a look out for these. We would be very grateful for reports (contact e-mail: gunnarh@hi.is).

Our studies have been supported by grants from the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Highland Ringing Group, for which we are extremely grateful. We are also grateful for the use of the Sandgerdi Marine Center as a base to work from, and to the Iceland Institute of Natural History for the loan of cannon-nets. Reports of our trips have been deposited in the SOC library.

Ron Summers, David Aiton, Brian Etheridge, Gunnar Pór Hallgrímsson, Jacquie Heaton and Bob Swann

Opening of Waterston House

A gloriously sunny day welcomed invited guests to the October 1st opening of the SOC's new headquarters, Waterston House at Aberlady. There was time for plenty of chat over a glass of wine and a chance to inspect the grounds and splendid interior of the building. The company comprised those with key positions within the SOC, others who were instrumental in the planning, construction and funding of the building and also past office-bearers and local dignitaries. Although interpretation, the true function of the premises, had still to become evident, the Library and Gallery art exhibition generated much discussion, as did the deep pool outside.

Mike Fraser ready with the drinks (Jimmy Maxwell)

Eventually, the audience settled in the Gallery for the official speeches of the Opening Ceremony. The first to speak was Mark Holling, SOC President.

Mark Holling

Good Afternoon, Ladies and Gentleman. It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Waterston House, the Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre and headquarters of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, the SOC. My name is Mark Holling and it has been my privilege to be President of the SOC in what has been a most eventful period in our history. Before introducing our very special guest today, I would like to take just a few minutes to tell you a little about the SOC, what this magnificent new building will enable us to achieve in the future and give some background as to how we got here.

The SOC, Scotland's Bird Club, is for everyone interested in birds and birdwatching in Scotland and has been operating for nearly 70 years. We already produce a range of respected publications including the members' magazine, *Scottish Bird News* and a new annual report, the *Scottish Raptor Monitoring Report*. We hold two conferences a year, and are home to the magnificent Waterston Library, now here and accessible to all in this building. We have our own website, the first port of call for information about the birdwatching

Guests relax in the sunshine (Keith Macgregor)

scene in Scotland, and our 14 branches throughout the country provide programmes of lectures and outings. We support the network of 20 local bird recorders throughout Scotland and plan to develop this further to the benefit of the ornithological record and its contribution to documenting Scotland's biodiversity.

Now we have our own purpose-built centre, we can further develop our role in the Scottish scene. We will prepare education material for evening and weekend courses which we will hold here and which can form the basis for other similar initiatives throughout Scotland. We will present more events here at Waterston House, such as art and photographic exhibitions and book fairs. These facilities will enable us better to coordinate other SOC events elsewhere in the country. We are keen to develop our archive of paper, electronic and photographic material and to reach out to a wider audience with our publications. One major initiative I'd like to highlight is the new book, *Birds of Scotland*, due for publication in two years' time. This will bring together for the first time the wealth of information the SOC currently holds and has access to, presented in an attractive and stimulating way. Much of the future development of SOC will be through partnerships, working

with other bird and conservation groups such as BTO Scotland, RSPB Scotland and Scottish Wildlife Trust, agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and local businesses who can provide catering and accommodation.

Mark Holling opens *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Over 10 years ago, led in particular by former Presidents Ian Darling and Brian Downing (both here today), we started looking to move from central Edinburgh to a new building which would enable us to better pursue our charitable objectives, including the promotion of an interest in birds and providing a focus for those seeking information about birds in Scotland - somewhere that would allow us to effectively improve and enhance the services for which we have long been respected. In 2001, SOC Council decided to employ a Development Manager to promote and develop the SOC. At that time, Council, led by the then President Ian Andrews (also here today), recognised that a new and sustainable centre would need to be located close to a major, all-year round birdwatching site. Ideally, we were looking for a coastal site in central Scotland. And so it was that Bill Gardner, by now our Development Manager, identified this site here at Aberlady, one of the prime birdwatching venues in Scotland. I clearly remember that wet and windy day 3 years ago this month when representatives of the SOC from throughout the country, met to look at the site and provisional designs of the proposed new building. It was decided to proceed and the results you see before you today.

Then, as now, the Pink-footed Geese which roost here at Aberlady Bay each autumn and winter had arrived from their breeding grounds in Iceland. Someone else who came to Scotland from Iceland was of course Magnus Magnusson, who is with us here today to open this magnificent centre for us. Many of us will remember Magnus from his unforgettable role as question master on BBC television's Mastermind programme. But in addition to this and other BBC programmes, he has been a journalist with two Scottish newspapers and an author of many books on many topics. He has been a rector of Edinburgh University and a President of RSPB. He has also served as Chairman of SNH, the Scottish government agency responsible for managing our environment, and this provides a link to Scotland's birds and birdwatchers, which is what the SOC is all about.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my very great pleasure to present Magnus Magnusson.

Magnus Magnusson
Thank you, Mark Holling, for your kind introduction.

I feel greatly honoured to be invited to perform the official opening of this spanking new headquarters for the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, the SOC; and what a pleasure it is to see so many old colleagues and comrades gathered here to celebrate this triumphant occasion. It makes me feel a bit of a fraud, I must confess, because I would not dream of calling myself an environmentalist or an ornithologist – just a humble bird-watcher, ever since I founded a Bird-Watching Society as a ten-year-old schoolboy at The Edinburgh Academy. One of our supervised field-trips 'way back then was a visit to Duddingston Loch and then, more daringly, to Aberlady Bay, where we were entranced by the variety of birds we saw.

Mention of Aberlady Bay never fails to bring to mind an image of the late Nigel Tranter, that gallant old warhorse of Scottish historical fiction. Aberlady Bay was his study-muse, practically his office. He would sketch out his novels on a portable writing desk slung around his neck while he walked the dunes and mudflats; in his neat longhand he would scribble his thoughts as they came to him, using small pads of paper stapled together. This was his routine, every day, in all weathers – and when it rained he would put his hands in a polythene bag to keep the paper dry. His focal point was always the footbridge over the Peffer Burn – 'The Footbridge to Enchantment', as he entitled his collected articles on the countryside in 1992.

Aberlady has a huge place in the annals of nature conservation, too. Aberlady Bay was the first Local Nature Reserve to be declared in Scotland, more than 50 years ago. It was declared on 14 July 1952 by East Lothian County Council. Fifteen years later, at the instigation of the late Frank Tindall (the County Planning Officer), a newly-graduated PhD at the Department of Forestry & Natural Resources at Edinburgh University was commissioned to prepare its first Management Plan. That graduate was Michael B Usher, soon to become a lecturer in Biology at York University and then Chief Scientist of Scottish Natural Heritage, and now Leverhulme Emeritus Fellow at Stirling University. Michael tells me that it was this piece of work which really started his interest in nature conservation as opposed to natural history.

Magnus Magnusson with the main address *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

This Management Plan is a historic document in its own right. Michael Usher took nearly three months to write it, for which he was paid the princely sum of £100. The Council did not accept some of his main recommendations, such as extending the small car park at the Peffer Burn footbridge and forming a shallow artificial pond to increase feeding for waders; but it did agree to the appointment of a full-time Warden. But the value of Michael's document lay in its comprehensive description of the natural history and geology of the Reserve – and particularly its ornithology.

The list of birds recorded from the Reserve contained no fewer than 199 species of migrating birds, five further species of doubtful status and five additional sub-species (the total is now more than 300). They were all categorised as common, frequent, scarce, rare or very rare: birds such as the White-billed Diver, Manx Shearwater, Bittern, Snow Goose, Rough-Legged Buzzard, Temminck's Stint, Iceland Gull, Shore Lark, Bluethroat and

even Flamingo. *The Birds of Aberlady Bay Nature Reserve* were also the subject of a notable monograph of that name by Frank Hamilton and Keith Macgregor – good to see you both here today. Frank, of course, became the Scottish Director of the RSPB and was also a President of the SOC.

So the setting for this new headquarters for the Scottish Ornithologists' Club has impeccable environmental credentials. And what a splendid building it is, designed by Jenny Humphries of Simpson & Brown, constructed from Scottish timber from Drumnadrochit, oak and slate from Aberfoyle and cement from Dunbar. The total project costs were just over three-quarters of a million pounds (£768,000, to be precise) and clearly worth every penny. What a magnificent building it is!

It represents the culmination of the SOC's 40-year sojourn in Edinburgh to find its private Promised Land – a proper and appropriate home for its work and fine library of books and slides. The SOC's first headquarters was in Charlotte Square (courtesy of the National Trust for Scotland), and then 21 Regent Terrace, which was purchased for £3,050 in 1959 with the proceeds of an anonymous £4,000 donation to the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Endowment Fund, specifically for the establishment of a Scottish Centre for Ornithology and Bird Protection. In 1986, ownership of 21 Regent Terrace was transferred to the SOC. By the 1990s the building was valued at £300,000, but it was expensive to maintain and not suitable for large meetings, and in 2001 the Club decided to dispose of it. In March 2002, Bill Gardner, the newly appointed SOC Development Manager who had been closely involved in the creation of the Scottish Seabird Centre, sold 21 Regent Terrace for a cool £888,000 and the SOC moved into rented premises in Musselburgh.

It also fell to Bill Gardner to find a site for a new headquarters with year-round bird-watching potential. One day he was out bird-watching here at Aberlady Bay and realised that he had found the perfect site. He entered into negotiations with the Wemyss and March Estates, and eventually bought the site at the knockdown price of £88,000. It is most fitting that the Earl of Wemyss and March should have been involved through one of his estate trusts, because the Earl had been closely associated with the opening of 21 Regent Terrace back in 1959. And how pleased we all are to see him here today.

Ladies and gentlemen: I have left to the last the most important name associated with this fine building – that of George Waterston, in whose honour it is dedicated (and we are delighted that some of the Waterston family are here today). Edinburgh-born George Waterston was the fifth of that name in direct descent from the George Waterston who in 1752 had founded the venerable firm of printers and stationers. His mother was a Sandeman, so George was nothing if not well-connected.

George was expected to join the family firm as a matter of course; indeed, he gave it a whirl for a time, but his heart wasn't in it. Like me, he had been a pupil at the Edinburgh Academy, where he had first become interested in birds; birds – and specifically, the birds of Fair Isle, halfway between the Orkneys and Shetland, became his consuming lifelong passion, and nothing and nobody was going to deflect him from that course.

George first visited Fair Isle in September 1935, at the age of 24 and returned every summer until the outbreak of war in 1939. By then he had become the honorary secretary of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, which he had helped to found in 1936. Nor did the war interfere unduly with his passion: as a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery he was captured after the fall of Crete in 1941, but even in a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany, (OFLAG VII.B), Fair Isle remained uppermost in his mind. It was there that he wrote out a Business Development Scheme for the island:

Lord Hope browses in the Library (Jimmy Maxwell)

1 Buy the island himself, or persuade the National Trust for Scotland to buy it, as a Nature Reserve with the establishment of a Bird Observatory under the auspices of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, with himself as resident warden and factor;

2 Organise and manage the following:

a) the Bird Observatory with its traps and ringing station;

b) a Bird-watchers' Hostel at 'Portola Cottage' with accommodation for 12 observers;

c) a marketing scheme for all island produce, where possible under an advertised, protected trademark;

d) a Co-operative store for buying foodstuffs, clothing and other necessities for the island community at economic rates;

e) the development of the island's general welfare with a progressive agricultural policy;

f) the improvement of general amenities of the island; and

g) the preservation of the local characteristics, traditions and crafts on the island.

By now George was suffering badly from kidney trouble, which had first afflicted him as a schoolboy, and in 1943 he was repatriated.

His blueprint for Fair Isle was not just about bird protection. It was not just about nature conservation. This – years and years ahead of its time – was a template for harmony between Nature *and* People.

After the war George joined the family business. Lord knows what the business got out of it – the office at the back of Waterston's shop in George Street became the office of the SOC and of much other ornithological business. Fair Isle came on the market in 1948 and, with the help of his connections in the form of an interest-free loan from Lord Bruntsfield, George Waterston bought it for £3,500. He set up the Fair Isle Observatory Trust, with himself as the secretary; soon he transferred the ownership of Fair Isle to the National Trust for Scotland – and what a friend the National Trust has proved to be!

And what a great planner George proved himself to be. Fair Isle, with its resident population of 70 hardy souls, is thriving in just the way he had envisaged. The islanders' livelihoods come from crafting, fishing and tourism. A thriving knitting co-operative sells its products worldwide. The island is surely one of the most eco-friendly communities in the UK. Its electricity supply is provided by two windmills – back in 1982 it was the first commercial wind-powered scheme in Britain. Right now, two of the restored island homes are vacant – and applicants are queuing up for the privilege of becoming Fair Islanders; they know they have to go through a demanding scrutiny

in order to determine if they are the right people for this very special community.

George had an unswerving vision for the future of ornithology in Scotland – a building which would bring together the SOC, the RSPB (of which he was by then part-time Scottish representative) and the Fair Isle Trust. And this came to pass with the purchase of 21 Regent Terrace in 1959. By now he had married his second wife, Irene; at the same time RSPB required a full-time Scottish Director, because George's energies had so broadened the field of bird protection in Scotland, and George was the obvious choice. When Ospreys began nesting in the Cairngorms after an absence of some 50 years, it was George who had the vision in 1959 to open the RSPB's Operation Osprey at Loch Garten to the public in order to protect the birds further. Within six weeks, while three Osprey chicks were still at the nest, no fewer than 14,000 visitors came to see the Osprey family for themselves. While the Loch Garten nest was guarded night and day by RSPB staff and hundreds of volunteers over the years, more than a million members of the public have visited the Osprey Centre to view the birds on closed circuit television. Today there are more than 100 pairs in Scotland, producing more than 150 young each year – and some have even been 'exported' to Rutland Water to help them re-establish in England. Now, that's what I call a success story.

This is the period, in my days as a journalist, when I have the sharpest recollections of George, busying himself in his Fair Isle sweater and smoking his pipe like a demented West Coast puffer; his wife Irene, who had taken over as SOC secretary when George moved to the RSPB, also smoked a pipe – people after my own heart, indeed!

In 1972, signs of total renal failure began to appear and George resigned from his job at the RSPB and the couple moved to a cottage in Humbie. A kidney transplant operation failed, alas, and from then on George was condemned to the inexorable tyranny of a home dialysis machine. But George refused to give in to the disease; in July 1980 he attended the opening of the new Fair Isle hall. It was his final visit, however. Two months later he died, and was laid to rest in the old churchyard at Humbie.

He died laden with honours: an OBE for his services to British ornithology and conservation in 1964 and an honorary LL.D from Dundee University in 1974. But there was more to come: in 2004, George was posthumously given the Golden Plover Award for the most significant contribution to the work of the RSPB in Scotland over the last century. And now – all this.

Ron Forrester and Ian Andrews discuss BS3 *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Si monumentum requiris, circumspice – 'If you seek a monument, gaze around you.' That is the epitaph to Sir Christopher Wren, its architect, displayed in St Paul's Cathedral, London. As we gather here, George Waterston and the library he started and memories of him are all around us.

Through the window we have this wonderful view over Aberlady Bay, arguably the best bird-watching strip on mainland Scotland, where shortly the geese from Iceland will come gaggling in to their winter roost. A magical place. And here it is easy to conjure up the shade of George Waterston, murmuring in the words of Horace's celebrated Ode: 'I have erected a monument more lasting than bronze.' Because that is precisely what he did when he helped to found the SOC all these years ago.

Shortly we shall be going out to hansel the new water-feature at the back of this building. But for now, ladies and gentlemen, all that remains for me to do is formally to declare open Waterston House, the new Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. Thank you all for coming.

Last to speak was Development Manager, Bill Gardner, who concentrated more on the practicalities of the building's development.

Bill Gardner

Thank you very much Magnus for your well chosen words. Good afternoon everyone.

As the SOC's fundraiser and project manager for this wonderful building, I'd first of all like to say how much I have enjoyed helping to create it over the last three years. It has been a real privilege and I hope that everyone here today likes the final result.

Today my job is to thank everyone who helped make it all happen. It's quite a long list so please bear with me.

Firstly I'd like to thank our past President Ian Andrews and current President Mark Holling for giving me the job of Development Manager way back in November 2001. Their commitment to the project over the years has been much appreciated along with the support of several SOC committees, mainly SOC Council and Management Group. In particular I'd like to thank Vicky McLellan and Bryan Downing of the Property Working sub-committee for their personal support and their commonsense advice throughout the project.

As Magnus mentioned earlier, fate decreed that I should visit the west side of Aberlady Bay on my first day at work for the SOC . It was a natural place to pick at that time of year and it also seemed equally natural that perhaps SOC should consider having its HQ here. The search for a site in Aberlady eventually led myself and Bryan Downing, an architect and past SOC President, to the office of Mr Martin Andrew, Factor for the Wemyss and March Estates. Without the help and great kindness shown by Martin and Lord Wemyss we would not be here today.

Throughout the project, Mary White and James Rust of Morton Fraser gave us wise advice about all the legal niceties of selling our old property and buying the new ground. It was always a pleasure to deal with them, thank you Mary. With the possibility of a site, the next consideration was Planning permission - this we achieved and all our other necessary certification, from East Lothian Council's helpful staff.

To get planning permission we had to submit a detailed design which was largely created by Jenny Humphries and Adrian Roberts of Simpson and Brown of Leith. I'm sure you'll agree they have achieved a stunning result. I had originally recruited Stewart Brown of Simpson and Brown to work on my original concept for the Scottish Seabird Centre at North Berwick way back in 1991 and I have great respect for their imagination and quality.

Stewart suggested that Wm Rudd, Civil engineers, be included in the team and we are grateful to Chris Milne for designing all our roads, drains and the structural calculations for the building and its foundations.

Alan Cumming of Alan Cumming Associates, our neighbour at our temporary office in Musselburgh, handled all our Mechanical and Electrical design work. John Hunter of Hardies, our QS, helped find us a builder and tracked all the project costs and design changes throughout, always with a smile, thank you John. The magnificent timber frame was designed by Steff and Steve Lawrence at Carpenter Oak and Woodland's yard at Kirriemuir. This splendid frame came on a single truck and was erected with loving care in just 6 days. The frame all around us is held together with oak pegs and was made entirely from Douglas Fir machined initially at James Jones's sawmill at Kirriemuir by Charlie Riddell, from timber harvested from a Forestry Commission stand of timber near Inverness.

The Landscaping and planting scheme was designed by Linda Mackinnon of the Garden Partnership and constructed by her business partner Paul Smith who together created all the spaces, paving and walling that complement the building so well.

Calum Gordon of the well-named firm of "Splash Gordon" from Balfron, created the superb wildlife pond, waterfall and large rockery at the rear and east of the building. On warm days certain staff have been known to don their swimsuits to retrieve the steady stream of golf balls that augment our income. However the best bounty is the pair of grey wagtails that come most days. Did someone know it was my favourite bird?

However the biggest thanks on the construction front must go to the team from John Dennis & Company Ltd. Today we have Stewart Vallance here who, as site agent, ran a tight and smart ship. Stewart did a marvellous job and brought with him a terrific team of joiners and subcontractors. It took John Dennis & Co just 10 months to carry out all the construction and fitting out work, pretty much to time and to budget. All the workmen on the site told me they were glad to be part of such a special building and they too deserve a round of thanks.

On the sponsorship side of the project, the list of supporters is almost as long. While the bulk of the capital required came from the sale of 21 Regent Terrace, an appeal to SOC members and Branches collected over £30,000 - many thanks to those who supported their own Club. In particular, Geoff Ball and his wife Mary gave a considerable sum which was matched by the CALA Group.

Our largest external sponsor was Forest Enterprise Scotland who adopted our building early on as an exemplar of how native grown timber can be an attractive and sustainable option for developments such as ours. FES donated all the raw timber for the Frame, Cladding, Rafters, Joists, Sarking, Studding and Flooring. For this tremendous generosity I have to thank Dr Hugh Insley, CE and Bob MacIntosh, Director, Forestry Commission Scotland and also Derek Nelson for his practical help, along with lots of other Commission staff with whom working was a real pleasure. The FC also donated all the landscaping rock from their quarry on the Duke's Pass at Aberfoyle. Hugh Insley also introduced me to Ian Pirie and Michael Leslie of James Jones Ltd, who carried out most of our sawmilling and John Russell of Russwood from Newtonmore, who processed and supplied our beautiful Oak flooring. All of this wood and processing was given freely and we really appreciate their kindness.

Nearer home I have to thank David Chrystall of Lafarge Cement at Dunbar for the gift of all our cement and also their sister company Redland Roofing for giving us a special deal on the roof tiles. Next to the Blue Circle Plant at Dunbar, John Watson, of John Watson Seeds, donated many tons of gravel for the project and Stewarts Turf from Dalkeith kindly gave us 150 sq meters of turf. Keith Macgregor, here today, decided he too would like to try his hand at gifts in kind fundraising and magically produced two brand new condensing boilers for our central heating. Well done Worcester Bosch and Keith. To keep the heat in at Waterston House, Superglass at Stirling, via their MD Mr John Smillie, donated all our insulation, interestingly made from old car windscreens.

This has been a long list of credits and I'm just about there. Without the support of staff members Kate, Jean, Jill and Caroline I doubt if I could have coped. A special thanks to them. I'd also very much like to thank my wife Ann for putting up with all the stresses and strains and supporting me throughout the project. She also hung the beautiful exhibition of some of Scotland's best bird artists, of whom Keith Brockie and John Busby are here today. All the paintings are for sale.

Our VAT expert Charles Rumbles helped advise us on VAT matters and kept me on the straight and narrow. Many thanks to Charles and to Customs and Excise who allowed us to reclaim the entire VAT incurred on the construction. I'm sure you'll agree our team has created something special for SOC which will help us to encourage more people to enjoy Scotland's birdlife. All these people made this building happen, please let all your friends know just how special it is and come back and see us. Thank you.

The last official duty for Magnus was the switching-on of the artificial waterfall feature at the rear of the building. This he did with typical humour, gamely clambering up the rock surrounds - the guests lined themselves along the decking and around the pool. The rest of the occasion was a sociable get-together in the main foyer where everyone enjoyed the delicious spread laid on by the building's staff and volunteers. They are to be congratulated for helping to make this historic occasion a most enjoyable one and a fitting start for our new home.

Bill Gardner and Magnus at the fountain (Jimmy Maxwell)

Forestry and Birds in Scotland

Will Huckerby Osprey-ringing in Borders (Forestry Commission)

Moira Baptie, Environment Manager at Forest Enterprise Scotland, gives her perspective on how the relationship between forestry and birds in Scotland has developed. Her article will be in two parts (the next in SBN 79)

Part 1

Forestry has come a long way since the debate on planting in the Flow Country during the 1980s. I was studying to be a forester at the time, and remember wondering what this remarkable landscape actually looked like. Interestingly enough I got the opportunity to see the **Blanket bogs** of Caithness and Sutherland at first hand when I applied to be the Forest District Manager in Dornoch District in the mid 1990s. What struck me were the scale and the light. How the shadows of the clouds that were reflected across the landscape and in the dubh lochans changed the hue as they moved across these vast areas of blanket bog - very dramatic and well worth a visit.

It wasn't long before I began to learn about bog forming mosses and the hydrology of blanket bogs. Forest Research was beginning to look at the impact of trees planted adjacent to pristine blanket bog and the RSPB and Scottish Natural Heritage were embarking on the first European-funded LIFE project to restore the best areas of blanket bog. Ten years on and along with RSPB, SNH and Plantlife, we have just completed a Phase 2 LIFE project, which set out to restore 17,700 hectares of the highest priority areas of damaged blanket bog within the Flow Country. This included the removal of trees and the blocking of drains to raise the water level and allow Sphagnum mosses to re-colonise and expand.

The **Flow Country** is home to a wonderful assemblage of important bird species including Golden Plovers, Hen Harriers, Merlins, Dunlins, Greenshanks and Black-throated Divers. Managing habitat is key to their survival, but sometimes this is insufficient, especially when a species is at a very low level. Habitat management can take time and sometimes other work that specifically addresses individual threats or issues can allow a population to be maintained or even expand in the intervening period. I saw my first Black-throated Diver in Dornoch Forest District, and it was there that I learnt about the benefit of providing artificial floating diver islands as nest sites that were safe from flooding and from certain predators. Tony Hinde, the Forestry Commission Conservation Manager, had installed several throughout Dornoch and other Forest Districts in the late 1980s and early 1990s for both **Red- and Black-throated Divers**. The success of these has been proven through careful monitoring, and we now have a five-year partnership agreement with RSPB to maintain these rafts.

Education Minister Peter Peacock (with chick), David Jardine and Roy Dennis ringing (Hugh Insley)

Although I am the Environment Manager for Forest Enterprise Scotland, I am not an ornithologist. However the wonderful thing about working for Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) is that I am surrounded by **excellent ornithologists**; one illustration of this is the number of species accounts being contributed by FCS staff to the Birds of Scotland (BS3) book. FCS benefits greatly from the skills that these members of our team have developed, often in their own spare time. They can feed their expert knowledge into long term plans for forest restructuring, felling and planting known as Forest Design Plans to ensure that we are choosing the correct areas for habitat improvement and that the most appropriate silvicultural systems are being used. At the operational level they also have a key role to play in checking for nest sites prior to operations beginning and in maintaining an up to date record of all sites within Forest Districts. However with over 667,000 hectares of land in FCS management, and another 865,000 hectares of woodland in private ownership, foresters are always appreciative of help from local ornithologists in discovering new sites or checking sites. So if you know of important nest sites within your local woodlands contact your local Forest District or Conservancy (contact details can be found on the website www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland). **If we don't know about nest sites then we cannot protect them!**

Capercaillie and Black Grouse are key species that foresters can have a significant impact on and both are priority species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Both have also experienced dramatic declines in population over the last few decades - down to only 1,000 Capercaillie in 1998 and around 6,500 Black Grouse in 1996.

As a member of the **Capercaillie** Biodiversity Action Plan Group for the past six years I have witnessed a really concerted effort from all partners and from the Scottish Executive and the EU to halt the decline of this iconic Scottish species. Private estates in core areas, together with at least nine Forestry Commission Districts within Scotland are managing habitat for Capercaillie. Three Forest Districts are planning for Capercaillie expansion into previously occupied areas. The other six still have lek sites and have been working hard with Kenny Kortland, Capercaillie Project Officer and his assistant James

Blackcock lek (Forestry Commission)

Gordon, to count leks and undertake work to improve both lek and brood habitats. Blaeberry is the main habitat for caterpillars that provide an important protein source for chicks in the first few weeks after hatching. Lower impact silvicultural systems which avoid clear-felling have significantly increased in area over the last few years. These systems allow us to achieve the correct light levels under the tree canopy to optimise blaeberry growth. Ditch blocking to create wet areas important for insects is also part of the brood habitat management that we have been undertaking.

The European-funded Capercaillie LIFE Project has been instrumental in achieving work within both privately owned forests and the national forests managed by FCS. A recent census combined with lek and brood counts suggests that the population may have now increased to somewhere around the 2000 mark. We estimate that 10–15% of the Capercaillie population is within the national forest that Forest Districts are managing on behalf of the public. However we realise that it is early days and that we need to continue with the work we have started. Both Kenny and James' posts are part funded by FCS along with RSPB, SNH and 'Friends of Capercaillie'. We recognise that having dedicated Project Officers, who can provide advice to Woodland Officers, private owners and Forest District staff is extremely beneficial when working on a wide scale recovery programme. Birds don't recognise ownership boundaries, and both Capercaillie and Black Grouse need landscape scale management to ensure their survival.

We are working closely with RSPB on at least two **Black Grouse** recovery projects – one in Argyll and the other in Dumfries and Galloway. Several Forest Districts have developed plans for black grouse conservation work, including Dornoch, Scottish Lowlands and Cowal & Trossachs. At Glen Affric and Cannich, close to the RSPB Reserve at Corrimony we are considering work for Black Grouse that will link in with the work on the reserve. Much work includes feathering woodland edges to provide open woodland and a mosaic of open ground. Swiping heather to provide patches of younger heather and blaeberry for food and older growth for shelter is also being undertaken. There is still much that could be done both in the national forests and within private woodlands, and the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme, administered by Forestry Commission Scotland, encourages private owners to undertake targeted work for Black Grouse and Capercaillie.

Children watching wildlife from a Forestry Commission hide *(Forestry Commission)*

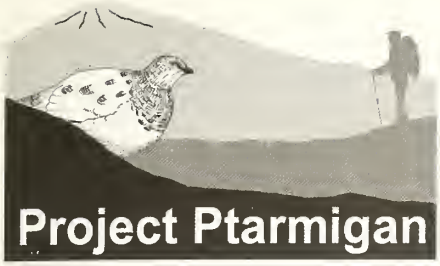
Much of the land managed by FCS is open land including peatland, mountain top and grassland. This includes 2,700 hectares of the Arran Moors Special Protection Area, notified for **Hen Harriers**. Each year, heather burning is carried out on Arran, providing a mosaic of different growth stages and moorland habitat that gives optimum conditions for the harriers. The FCS team on Arran hosted a heather management day last year, organised by SNH, to demonstrate techniques to local landowners and farmers. FCS, RSPB & SNH are currently looking into the potential of providing closed circuit TV viewing of a harrier site on Arran for next season.

The Forestry Commission has a clear remit to manage for the environment, beginning with the 1985 amendment to the Forestry Act. Twenty years on, the three pillars of sustainability – social, environmental and economic are embedded in the UK Forestry Standard under which the national forest estate is managed.

The Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS) was first produced in 2000 and sets out the Scottish Executive's **aims and objectives for forestry in Scotland**. It is currently being reviewed and phase one of an extensive consultation has just taken place. If you would like to read the topic papers that have been produced or contribute then you can access information about the review process on www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland. The second stage of external consultation will take place in early 2006. A Strategic Environmental Assessment will be undertaken in tandem with the revision of the SFS to allow us to assess the impact of the aims and objectives being proposed for the new SFS. The SEA will greatly help in the decision making process and it will highlight any adverse impacts that objectives could have at an early stage. Next year each of the Forest Districts in Scotland will be reviewing their local Strategic Plans, once the outcome of the new Scottish Forestry Strategy is published, which will set the scene for the local reviews. This will present another opportunity for you to feed into strategic plans, but this time at the local and regional level.

In addition the 1990 Forestry Commission "Forest Nature Conservation Guidelines", which have stood the test of time well, are currently being revised and a draft should soon be available for comment. The joint FC and RSPB publication "Forests and Birds" produced in 1996, which has greatly helped both private owners and FC staff decide on how to manage for and protect birds is currently being revised to take account of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.

Moira Baptie,
Forestry Commission, Inverness
Moira.baptie@forestry.gsi.gov.uk



Project Ptarmigan

In the first widespread study of Rock Ptarmigan in the Highlands, BTO Scotland and the SOC are calling on birders and hill walkers to record sightings and signs of the birds. John Calladine and Jacqui Kaye explain Project Ptarmigan and how you can get involved...

The Rock Ptarmigan is Britain's only truly montane resident bird. An arctic relic, it is cleverly adapted to its mountain habitat. It is the only British bird to moult into a white winter plumage. In fact, the Ptarmigan moults its plumage three times during the year to blend in with rocks, snow or patches of each depending on the season.

Ptarmigan are distributed widely across the Scottish Highlands and they also occur on a few islands of the Hebrides and Clyde. They are normally found at altitudes over 750 metres, although in the far northwest they can be found as low as 200 metres, where the combination of altitude and exposure maintain the arctic-alpine heaths and rock-strewn fell fields that they inhabit. They are generally found where the natural vegetation is not able to grow more than 15 cm high.

Ptarmigan *(Courtesy of BS3)*

Range Contraction

Although there has certainly been a long-term contraction in their range, there is surprisingly little information on recent and current trends in Ptarmigan populations across the Highlands. They were recorded in 11% fewer 10-km squares during the 1988–91 national breeding birds atlas compared to the first in 1968–72, suggesting some continued contraction. Furthermore, some hardy hillwalking birders, farmers and estate workers provide supporting 'anecdotal evidence' to suggest that there are fewer birds on some hills than there were ten or twenty years ago. Although the subject of a seminal long-term study in the Cairngorms and the Mounth (largely by Dr Adam Watson), changes to the overall Scottish population and its distribution are not well understood. For example, just how are Ptarmigan faring on the periphery of their range on the hills of the Trossachs? And, do populations cycle on the isolated summits of Wester Ross, as they have been shown to do in the Cairngorms?

Some authors have attributed recent and historic changes in the distribution of Ptarmigan in Scotland to higher levels of grazing and to increased disturbance. Greater numbers of sheep and deer grazing the Highland's alpine heaths will have reduced the availability of berry-bearing ericaceous plants and other dwarf shrubs such as willows, all of which are important foods for Ptarmigan. An increase in generalist predators such as crows and gulls attracted by food scraps from walkers, has also been suggested as affecting local Ptarmigan populations. Increased mortality associated with collisions with overhead wires around ski tows has probably also had some local impact.

Impact of Climate Change

Climate change is now high on the political and environmental agenda and is a real concern not only for Ptarmigan but also for the general condition of montane environments. Any impact of climate change on these areas and for Ptarmigan will be complex. At its simplest, one can imagine an ever reduced and more fragmented area of suitable Ptarmigan habitat as generally warmer conditions allow taller growing heathers and grasses higher up the hill. Less snow cover in winter may well make white Ptarmigan more vulnerable to predation. Furthermore, less snow cover may increase the availability of ericaceous plants to grazing animals through the winter. Increased wet and windy springs are unlikely to help breeding attempts. On the positive side, for Ptarmigan at least, skiing developments are unlikely to become much more widespread.

Population level responses to variation in climate have been shown for the ecologically similar White-tailed Ptarmigan *Lagopus leucurus* in Colorado. In restricted study areas in Scotland, weather has also been shown to be a likely contributory factor influencing the dynamics of Ptarmigan populations. It is now time to monitor our Ptarmigan populations more widely across the Highlands and especially from peripheral parts of the range where any changes may be expected to be most noticeable.

Scotland's Montane Habitats

It is becoming evermore important to understand Scotland's mountains, their wildlife and how environmental factors interact in these fragile habitats. Ptarmigan are resident in their montane environment throughout the year and as they are still relatively widespread across the Highlands, this makes them an ideal indicator of environmental change in montane habitats.

As well as attempting to understand Ptarmigan population dynamics and their mountain habitats, another principal aim of *Project Ptarmigan* is to encourage and train new volunteers to carry out survey work in the Scottish uplands. So, in addition to involving birdwatchers, BTO Scotland and the SOC are encouraging other hill users, such as hillwalkers, mountaineers and estate workers to systematically, but simply, collect information on the birds.

Camouflaged Ptarmigan *(Peter M. Wilson)*

Monitoring Strategy

Using the results of *Project Ptarmigan* in 2006, a strategy for long-term monitoring of Ptarmigan and other suitable montane species and their habitats will be developed. This will be undertaken in consultation with colleagues developing potentially complementary surveys.

Getting Involved

To get involved in *Project Ptarmigan* or for more information, please contact Jacqui Kaye, Development and Fieldwork Co-ordinator at BTO Scotland's offices in Stirling. Email: Jacqui.Kaye@bto.org or telephone 01786 466560. Specialist bird knowledge is not essential as BTO Scotland will issue straightforward guidelines.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the AEB Trust and Scottish Mountaineering Trust for funding the initial pilot study in 2005 and the Scottish Executive's Biodiversity Action Grants Scheme for funding the full project in 2006.

John Calladine & Jacqui Kaye
BTO Scotland

NOTES & COMMENT

Golden Eagle Pellets

After watching the young Golden Eagle practising its hunting technique on a lamb, (featured in *SBN* 77), I decided to try and locate some pellets, the regurgitated indigestible remains of a raptor's meal, in an effort to determine exactly what the Golden Eagles in this area were eating. To achieve this, I first of all studied Ordnance Survey maps covering a habitat of hill and moorland where I had regularly observed these birds and measuring approximately 12 square miles.

Routes were planned to cover prominent hills but after a number of weeks in the field, it soon became apparent that the eagles I had been observing preferred to perch and dine either on top or on the ledge of rocky cliff faces. Some of these were as little as 12 foot high and many faced onto a loch.

Golden Eagle pellets *(Frank Stark)*

At one elevated site overlooking a deep dark loch, I discovered the remains of various birds and mammals including Heron, Raven, Greylag, Rabbit and the skull of a Hedgehog. The pellets collected were divided almost equally between fur and feather and those entirely of sheep's wool.

Frank in Golden Eagle habitat *(John McDonald)*

The large size of these castings left me in little doubt what had produced them, although for a moment I did consider the possibility that a White-tailed Sea Eagle could have been responsible. Although the pellets of both eagles are indistinguishable, I had never spotted any of these larger birds in that area and felt confident about the identification. Remnants of two legs did suggest that lambs were in fact part of the diet, but only a small part. However, it wasn't just the Golden Eagle's diet that interested me but how they went about catching their prey.

The remaining primary feathers of the Heron and Raven I mentioned earlier had intrigued me. They were short and the shaft ends were still showing signs of growth, an indication that they were most likely youngsters probably not long out of the nest. My theory, although I have not witnessed this, is that the eagle, particularly during the summer months, would sit on a lofty perch above the loch, beneath the skyline, camouflaged by a backdrop of rocks and heather. Families of birds and mammals attracted to the water to drink or bathe would then become easy targets, especially the naive youngsters, and the eagle, with the advantage of surprise and height would swoop down at the precise moment, crushing its unsuspecting prey in its powerful talons.

At home I teased and prodded at the pellets thinking that, with many years of roving the countryside under my belt, I would surely be able to identify some of the bits and pieces that emerged. After all, it is well documented what Golden Eagles eat, it was just a matter of finding these things among the fractured remains within the tightly compressed balls of fur and wool. Strange and weird items started to appear and it soon became clear that I needed the assistance of a specialist to analyse the pellets properly.

Fortunately, Dr Mick Marquiss at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Banchory has agreed to do this and I will submit his findings once he has reached his conclusions.

Frank Stark

Immature Golden Eagle *(Frank Stark)*

The Mystery of Nestbox No 3

On the 13th May this year I was checking my nestboxes in an oak wood up the Scaur Water north of Penpont. In box No 3, a normal small box with a 1" slot across under the top, there was what looked like the start of a Redstart nest. I returned on the 27th May and found 11 eggs altogether - 5 blue Redstart eggs and 6 speckled white eggs with reddish spots. On checking from a distance, a Treecreeper was seen entering the box. I returned on the 6th June to find no eggs but 5 newly-hatched young being fed by a Treecreeper. When feeding was again observed on 10th

June, I checked the box to find the young at the "eyes just open" stage and they looked like young Redstarts! After consulting with my ringing trainer, Brian Turner on 15th June, we decided that the young were definitely Redstarts. I ringed the brood which by this stage had half-grown primaries and red rumps. A week later the young had flown.

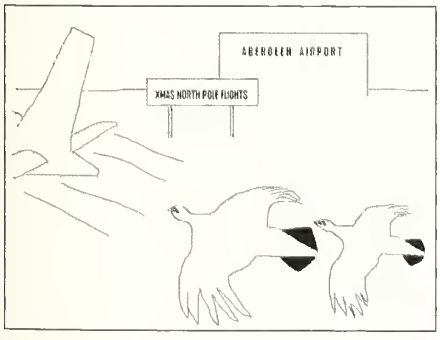
On 15th August I cleaned out the nestbox and found that below the Redstart's nest was the start of what looked like a Treecreeper nest. It looked therefore as though a nest had been started by the Treecreeper, taken over by a Redstart, which laid 5 eggs, and was then taken back by the Treecreeper which laid its own eggs and raised the Redstart young. It puzzles me what happened to the Treecreeper eggs as there was no sign of them inside or outside the nestbox. Also, did the young Redstarts think that they were Treecreepers or Redstarts, has anyone any ideas?

Rab Smith

Rab is a member of the SOC Dumfries Branch and may be contacted at rabsmith@tesco.net. We welcome all contributions from our various branches. (Eds.)

Global Warming

SNH and the Centre for Mountain Studies at Perth College have edited "*Mountains in Northern Europe: Conservation, Management, People and Nature*". The book contains a study by University College London environmental research centre which states that the mountains of Scotland are likely to suffer higher pollution levels by toxic pollutants as a result of global warming.



Pheasant catching and eating Coal Tit

On the afternoon of 6th October, 2005, an immature cock Pheasant was feeding on the birdtable 3 metres from my window. Suspended about 30 cms above the table are two peanut dispensers and on one of these a Coal Tit was feeding. The Pheasant, which had been eating cracked wheat, suddenly lunged at the tit, caught it and shook it vigorously like a terrier shakes a rat. The Pheasant then dropped the tit and pecked it violently before picking it up again and shaking it with such force that its tail and one of its wings were detached and fell onto the table along with the rest of the bird's body. The Pheasant then pecked at the body, eating parts of the flesh exposed on its victim's rump. It then picked up and shook the body again, but in losing its grip, the remains were propelled off into the nearby bushes (where I looked for them later without success. The bird was ringed, and "Killed by Pheasant" would have made an interesting entry under "Finding Details"). The Pheasant then pecked bits of flesh off the tit's disembodied wing.

Another Coal Tit, meanwhile, had landed on the peanut holder. The Pheasant made a swift grab at it but, this time, only succeeded in catching a beakful of feathers and the tit escaped. For the next ten minutes the Pheasant eyed-up, stalked, and then made a grab for any of the birds (all Coal or Blue Tits) visiting the peanuts, but did not manage to catch another. After finally pecking all the remaining flesh off the wing and tail of the dead Coal Tit, the Pheasant left.

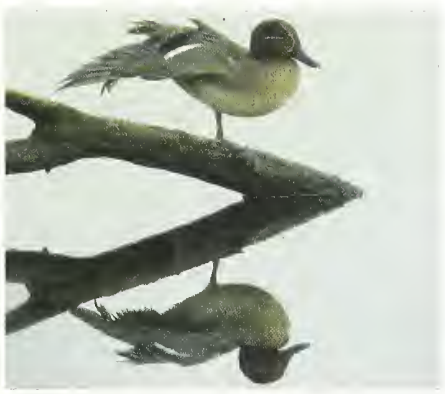
I can find no reference to Pheasants catching and eating birds. As part of the species' "omnivorous" diet, *BWP* mentions "small vertebrates", including snakes, lizards, frogs, voles and shrews. I have previously seen a female Pheasant catch and eat a large Common Toad, but never a bird.

Although up to five Pheasants at a time feed on the birdtable, and the opportunity for them to catch small birds such as tits and finches presents itself almost constantly, I have not seen this type of behaviour again.

Mike Fraser

Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the bird picture below and have a chance of winning an SOC hat.



Teal *(Stewart Love)*

Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 79. Send your single caption by E-mail to: jimmy.maxwell @virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3)

Grey Heron and Sand Martin *(Stewart Love)*

The winning Caption from *SBN* 77 (see photo above) came from Prof. Michael Thomas with: "Low-flying lads from Leuchars at it again!!!" Well done! Others: "Strange, last year he didn't appear until the 23rd – 3.30 I think it was..." – Andy Neustein. "Hell! Nobody told me they nested in old car tyres!" – Laurence and Pamela Draper.

Aberlady Primary School Art Competition

Prizes (jointly sponsored by SOC and Cala Homes) were presented to the winners of the Aberlady Primary School Art Competition on Friday 30th September 2005, by Bill Gardner. Each of the winners received a complimentary SOC family membership, a book and a book token.

Katie's amazing picture of a Barn Owl hunting

First Prize: Katie Innes, aged 10 (P6/7) "Barn Owl". **Second Prize:** Elliott Bruce, aged 10 (P6/7) "Curlew (and other birds)". **Third Prize:** Rhiordan Fortune, aged 10 (P6/7) "Puffin".

Congratulations to the winners!

BirdTrack – making more use of your birdwatching records

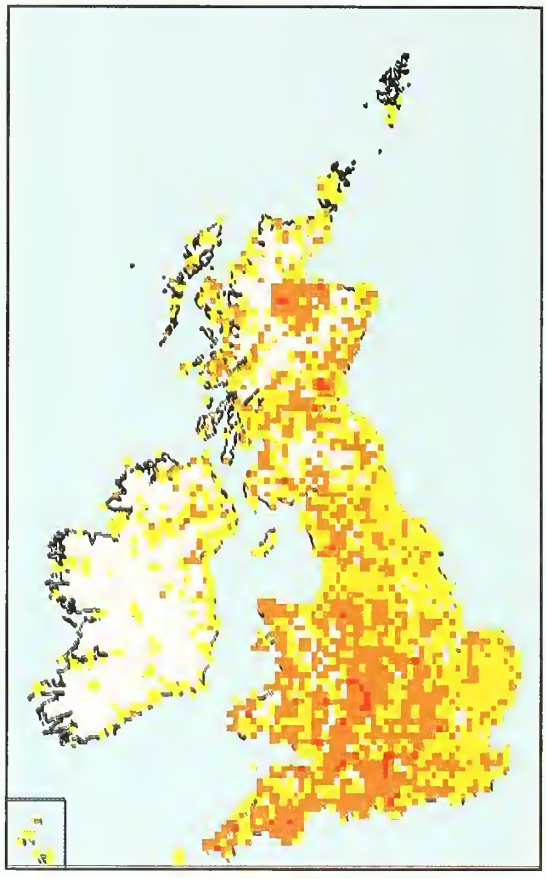
The BirdTrack project organised by BTO on behalf of BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland is interested in tracking the arrival of migrants through its specially designed website. BirdTrack is not just interested in your first sighting of a Redwing, Fieldfare or Pink-footed Goose this autumn but wants to monitor the mass arrival of these species and others. Birdwatchers submit lists of all the species they see and hear whilst out birdwatching at a site. These 'complete lists' are really the basis of BirdTrack and from these we can plot the pattern and timing of arrival and compare with previous years. The real benefit of using 'complete lists' is that it overcomes any variation in recording effort – so listing can be scientific!

BirdTrack isn't just about migrants. We can also monitor seasonal movements, such as the autumn and spring movements of Siskins or perhaps a cold weather movement of Lapwings or Starlings (if we get a cold winter!). We can also use records of scarce or rare species such as Hawfinch to help build up a picture of distribution on an annual basis. Given that national bird atlases are compiled every twenty years or so, BirdTrack could help fill gaps in species monitoring. Just think how the distribution of the Buzzard and Little Egret has changed since the last Breeding Atlas in 1991. Using records from BirdTrack, we can produce annual distribution maps for species.

One of the most exciting aspects of taking part in BirdTrack is entering your records of migrants, and looking at your dot on the map and seeing how it fits in with movements at the national scale. BirdTrack is updated every night so you will be able to see your sighting on the map the next day.

So next time you go out birdwatching, whether it is to the coast, a local nature reserve or just out walking locally, make a list of all the species you see or hear and enter your records into BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net).

Dawn.balmer@bto.org



The distribution of Buzzard based on submissions to BirdTrack. The yellow squares have been visited but no Buzzards recorded; orange shaded squares show where Buzzards have been recorded. *(BTO)*

The arrival of Redwings in autumn 2005. Redwings arrive from populations in Iceland, Scandinavia and further east to Russia. *(BTO)*

BOOK REVIEWS

The Gyrfalcon, Eugene Potapov and Richard Sale, 2005. T & AD Poyser, London, 288pp, ISBN 0-7136-6563-7, £35.

If, like me, your only experience of a Gyrfalcon has been a tantalising glimpse of this superb raptor, the description of which was subsequently rejected by the authorities, then you will be fascinated by this book. It remains an iconic species which most of us will never encounter on its arctic breeding grounds.

The dustjacket describes the book as 'highly readable and extensively researched'. It is certainly a brilliant study, but hard going in the first chapters. However, one cannot argue that it has not been well researched. The principal reason for this is that the senior author, a Russian ornithologist, has had a wealth of Russian ornithological literature at his fingertips, as well as being able to visit all parts of the vast arctic range of the Gyrfalcon. To be able to write a monograph on this most difficult of raptors is an achievement indeed.

The first two chapters cover Palaeobiogeography and Systematics, and Identification and Colours. The first describes the evolution of the species and its genetics and statistics while the second explains in great scientific detail precise colours and patterns found in the species. These both pose a difficult read, but from then on the book improves, dealing with every possible aspect of the species' life history and relationships with other wildlife, including man. The other nine chapters cover Distribution, Population, Habitat and Landscape Preferences, Food and Feeding Habits, the Breeding Cycle, Dispersal and Movements, Competition and Relationships, Man and Falcons, and finally Threats and Conservation. I found the chapter on movements particularly interesting (it is irruptive, depending on the fortunes of its preferred prey of grouse spp.), while the section on birds of prey as cult creatures was intriguing. There is a 16 page colour section that illustrates various aspects of the text, of which seven pages are devoted to feather patterns. The 18 plates showing nest sites and the birds themselves are of much greater interest.

There is also a refreshing absence of complex diagrams and tables. There are only six tables and 20 figures, four of which are maps in the colour section depicting distribution. The first two chapters hold the majority, with five of the tables and nine of the figures. An appendix gives the scientific

names of plants and animals mentioned in the text, followed by a glossary. The senior author's unique depth of knowledge is highlighted by the fact that, in the reference section, 30% of the 536 cited works are in the Russian language only, a source of information to which most of us in the west just do not have access.

There is no doubt that this is a scholarly work and probably one of the most valuable and comprehensive on this species. However, unless you have a deep interest in the subject, I would hesitate to recommend it to the average birder except that it is another fine example from the Poyser stable.

Norman Elkins

Images of Nature from the Cairngorms WILDLAND Peter Cairns and Mark Hamblin, Mercat Press 150pp ISBN 1841830798 £ 25

At first glance this appears to be just another coffee table book. Open it and you will find it is much more. Each page is a revelation of evocative and superb pictures covering all aspects of this beautiful and varied landscape in all its seasons, plus the creatures large and small that are its inhabitants. The added bonus is that each section of the book is prefaced by a lengthy, in-depth appreciation covering a wide range of historical and natural facts. Then follows an appropriate selection of outstanding pictures each with an explanatory paragraph. Finally the views on how this vast landscape may look up to 100 years ahead are given by a selection of those who live and work in the area.

The contents of this plush publication with its competitive price cannot fail to impress and could easily solve a Christmas present problem.

Keith Macgregor

The Birds of Africa Volume VII. C Hilary Fry and Stuart Keith (Eds). 2004. Colour plates by Martin Woodcock, line drawings by Ian Willis and C Hilary Fry. 666 pp, Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 0-7136-6531-9.

From Ostrich to Snow Bunting, and some 2,128 other species in between, *The Birds of Africa* has reached its final volume. It seems unlikely that anyone with the first six would need any persuasion to buy the last, so this is as much an opportunity for celebration as for critical review.

The first in the series appeared way back in 1982. The editorial personnel and the publisher of *The Birds of Africa* may have changed since then, but an extremely high standard of content and presentation has been maintained. A succession of contributing authors has ensured that the species accounts are consistently accurate and up to date. This is exemplified by almost 50 pages of references in volume seven. These range from scientific papers to the short notes in local bird club bulletins that are such a useful source of qualitative but valuable observations that don't make the major league but, when taken together, contribute significantly to our knowledge.

One of the most remarkable things about this series is that all the plates have been painted by one artist: Martin Woodcock. I daresay he will know exactly how many individual bird paintings this involves, but it must run into thousands. His artwork has always been good, but probably never better than in this seventh volume, where his confidence and ability at portraying masses of small, often rather similar birds, is apparent. Congratulations to him on an incredible achievement.

This 666-page final volume deals with 309 species of seed-eaters, from sparrows to buntings and including weavers, widows, whydahs and waxbills. These are some of the most interesting (at least to me) birds on the continent. I particularly like the attention given to the nest building and architecture of the weavers, each species constructing its nest in a unique fashion. Ian Willis's drawings of these are excellent. The individual species accounts generally reflect the amount known about each bird with, for example, Yellow-legged Weaver getting barely a page, while Village Weaver gets six. Such coverage will highlight those species, many of them narrow-range endemics, that need more attention in future. Indeed, one of the major contributions that this series has made, and will continue to make, is highlighting the status and ecological requirements of rare and endangered species.

So, what next for *BoA*? Can we expect *BWP*-style updates and supplements? As new information on African birds continues to accumulate, and the recording of vagrants and the splitting of taxa by molecular systematics boosts the region's species count, how can we conveniently compile and access this often dispersed material? Whatever the future, the team (sadly without Stuart Keith, who died just before the last volume went to press) behind this monumental work can rest assured that it has more than fulfilled its goal to produce "*the* authority on the avifauna of Africa for many years to come", leaving us the pleasurable task of enjoying the extraordinary fruits of their labours.

Mike Fraser

Skye Birds. R.L. McMillan. Published by skye-birds.com. ISBN 0 9550253 0 3. Price £11.95 or direct from the publisher Bob McMillan, 11 Elgol, Broadford, Isle of Skye IV49 9BL for £14 including P&P.

This book couldn't have arrived at a better time for me. Regional avifaunas are a vital source of information for the new *'Birds of Scotland'* book and this publication filled a huge gap. This is the first dedicated book on the birds of Skye, but the section describing key past figures highlights the work of the Rev. Hugh Macpherson and Seton Gordon whose records appear throughout.

The islands of Skye, Raasay and a few smaller islands are covered in this attractively produced 173 page, A5 paperback. Introductory chapters include a 12 page 'where to birdwatch' guide, but without site maps - an Ordnance Survey map is essential. Delving into the 238 species accounts reveals many facts, here are just a few – Peregrines have never recovered, Greenshank winter, Greenfinch and Goldfinch expanding, but Yellowhammer declining. A total of 14 of Skye's birds are 'red listed' as being of high conservation concern.

The author has also brought Skye birds to the internet with skye-birds.com (this and other links can be found on the SOC website) and, together with this book, should be congratulated on promoting birdwatching on Skye for residents and visitors alike.

Ian Andrews

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RECENT REPORTS

A Review of autumn 2005

Black-headed Bunting, North-East Scotland *(Harry Scott)*

It was once again a great autumn for rare birds in Scotland. Coverage by observers, especially on islands at the peak times, has never been better, notably on the Outer Hebrides. It was one of the best autumns ever for Nearctic passerines with eight individuals of seven species seen between 15th Sept–8th Oct. It all started with a superb 1st-winter male **Yellow Warbler** at Garths Ness (Shetland) on 15th–17th Sept – the fourth record for Scotland and second for Shetland. A **Buff-bellied Pipit** was then reported on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 20th Sept (3rd record for Scotland if accepted) and before the month was out Scotland's third **Veery** was seen on Unst at Northdale on 22nd, trapped that evening it was unfortunately killed by a cat overnight - one of the same cats that have been responsible for killing amongst others, a Lanceolated Warbler. The Veery was the first record for Shetland, the previous two Scottish birds having been on the Outer Hebrides and on North Ronaldsay. Another *Catharus* thrush sp. was then seen the next day on Unst at Lamba Ness briefly (thought to be either **Swainson's or Grey-cheeked**) with then a **Bobolink** on Foula (Shetland) from the 29th Sept–4th Oct, a **Blackpoll Warbler** on South Uist at Loch Druidibeg plantation also on the 29th (with another Blackpoll then found amazingly on Skye (Highland) at Glasnakille on 4th Oct) and a **Red-eyed Vireo** at Liniclate, Benbecula (Outer Hebrides) on 30th Sept. The Outer Hebrides then rounded things off with Scotland's second-ever **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, a 1st-winter male at Ardmore Plantation, Barra on 8th Oct - the only other Scottish record being one on North Uist on 7th–8th October 1983.

Westerly winds were dominant for much of the time at the end of Sept and early Oct, though easterlies at the start of Sept did prove productive, especially on Shetland. Four **Thrush Nightingales** were seen on Shetland between the 4th–8th Sept with also there between the 2nd–6th Sept, three **Booted Warblers**. Three **Arctic Warblers** were seen with another of the latter on South Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 4th Sept and then a very late bird was at Stornoway woods on 2nd Nov (only the second record for the Outer Hebrides). Up to the 13th Oct, four **Greenish Warblers** were reported, all on Shetland with a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** on Fair Isle on 10th Sept - the same day as a **Subalpine Warbler** was seen briefly at Catterline (Aberdeenshire) with another in Oct at Quendale (Shetland) on 20th. The only **Citrine Wagtail** reported was on Foula (Shetland) on 24th Sept, the same island recording an early **Lanceolated Warbler** on 5th–6th Sept. Three more were seen between the 5th–17thOct, two on Fair Isle and one on the Out Skerries. Two **Pechora Pipits** were found on the 25th Sept – at Scatness (Shetland) and on North Ronaldsay (only the second record for Orkney). Nine **Olive-backed Pipits** were spread between the 25th Sept–9th Nov and included the first two records for the Outer Hebrides (on Barra in Oct and Lewis in Nov) as well as the first record for Fife: at Wormiston on 25th Oct. The second half of Oct in contrast to the second half of Sept was the best period of the autumn for eastern passerine rarities and the third week of Oct, as has been the case for the last three autumns, was the best week of the year on Fair Isle. The week was rounded off in style this year with a 1st-winter female **Siberian Rubythroat** on 23rd–27th, the second on there in the last three years. Two different **Black-throated Thrushes** were also on Fair Isle at the same time, a male and a female between 21st–24th (another female was at Geosetter (Shetland) on 4th Oct) whilst nearby, an **Isabelline Wheatear** was on North Ronaldsay on 23rd–29th (first record for Orkney). The only other rare wheatear of the autumn was a male **Desert Wheatear** briefly on the Out Skerries (Shetland) on 19th Oct. For once though, this Oct, mainland Scotland proved a match for the Northern Isles with two first records for Mainland Scotland leading the way, namely a **Paddyfield Warbler** at Torness Power Station (Lothian) on 13th–29th Oct and a male **Sardinian Warbler** at Fife Ness (Fife) on 15th Oct–1st Nov. In addition in mid Oct, a male **Black-headed Bunting** was at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg on 13th–18th (first record for North-East Scotland), a 1st-winter **Isabelline Shrike** was by Montrose Basin on 22nd–28th (first record for Angus) and a **Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler** appeared at Skateraw on 25th–27th (first record for Lothian). On the 15th both **Dusky** and **Radde's Warblers** were reported at St Abbs Head (Borders) with three other Dusky Warblers in Oct (two on Shetland and one at Scoughall (Lothian)) and another Radde's on the Isle of May on 16th.

The only **Rustic Bunting** of the autumn was one at Hoswick (Shetland) on 24th–27th Oct, and the only **Ortolan Bunting** was on Fair Isle on 12th Sept–3rd Oct. It was a good autumn though for **Little Bunting** with at least 25 reported, including one at Fallin on 26th Sept (first record for Upper Forth). Three **Arctic Redpolls** were on the Northern Isles between the 18th–30th Oct, associated with very good numbers of **Common**

Paddyfield Warbler, Lothian *(Ian Fisher)*

Redpolls, mostly Mealys, at the same time including 81 on Fair Isle on 25th Oct. Also in Oct 20+ migrant **Hawfinches** were noted as were 15+ **Northern Bullfinches** on the Northern Isles with **Waxwings** arriving from the 20th Oct - 300+ reported by the end of the month. There was a record showing by **Yellow-browed Warbler** with c.360 reported from the 11th Sept onwards, mostly in Oct when 170+ were reported from Shetland and Fair Isle, including 43 throughout the islands on the 1st and 12 on Fair Isle on the 15th. Elsewhere in Oct there were record showings on the Outer Hebrides and in Lothian, at least 11 were at St Abbs Head (Borders) on the 15th and away from usual areas, singles were on Islay and Coll (Argyll) and one was reported at Clatteringshaws Loch (Dumfries and Galloway) on 29th. Along with this Oct influx, at least 23 **Pallas's Warblers** were noted from the 15th Oct including the first

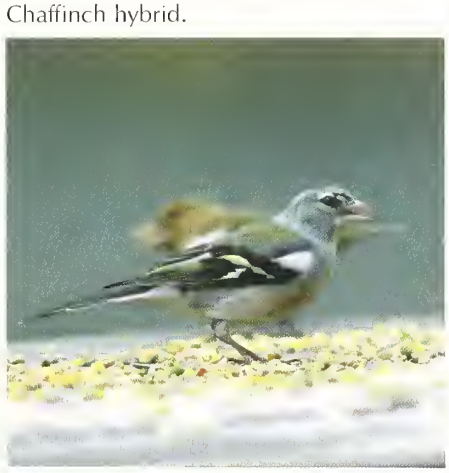
Bluethroat, Orkney *(Mark Caunt)*

(Lothian) on 28th Oct. 16 **Bluethroats** were all on Shetland and Orkney, 20 **Richard's Pipits** were noted including in Sept one on Islay (third record for Argyll) and in Nov one at Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) on 9th–at least 14th. Two **Black-bellied Dippers** were on Shetland in the

Isabelline Shrike, Angus *(Harry Scott)*

ever records for the Outer Hebrides: on South Uist on 20th–22nd and at Tarbert, Harris on the 22nd, though surprisingly only three **Firecrests** were reported. Four **Hoopoes** were seen in Oct with in the first week of Nov one at Inverythan (North-East Scotland), the long-staying **Bee-eater** at Helendale, Lerwick (Shetland) remained until 15th Oct at least and six **Rose-coloured Starlings** were noted in Sept and Oct. Of the 36 **Common Rosefinches** in Sept and Oct, one at Carstairs on 17th–18th Sept is only the second record for Lanarkshire. The 85+ **Barred Warblers** were mostly in Sept, and 32 **Red-breasted Flycatchers** in Oct, eight on the Outer Hebrides. Ten **Great Grey Shrikes** were reported from 18th Oct, three **Short-toed Larks** were seen on North Ronaldsay (2) and Fair Isle, and two **Shore Larks** were on Shetland in the last week of Sept with one then at Tyninghame

last week of Oct whilst an intriguing record in Oct concerns a **Chaffinch** photographed at Glenborrodale (Highland) on 25th–27th that appears to be a possible North African Chaffinch x Chaffinch hybrid.



Chaffinch sp., Highland *(Anthony Griffiths)*

As is almost routine these days, a juv **Pallid Harrier** was seen on Shetland in Sept, though only briefly at Sumburgh on the 29th (another small harrier sp. was near St Michaels (Fife) on 1st Oct). Six migrant **Honey Buzzards** were seen on Shetland between 2nd–6th Sept including three on Fair Isle on 2nd, six **Hobbies** were reported in Sept with five in Oct, and at least four **Rough-legged Buzzards** were noted in Oct and early Nov from Shetland (2+), Caithness and Borders, The **American Coot** reappeared on Loch of Benston (Shetland) on 24th Sept though was surprisingly last seen there on 1st Oct, a **Bittern** at St Abbs Head (Borders) on 9th–11th Sept was the first record for the reserve and four **Spotted Crakes** in Sept and Oct included a popular bird at Baron's Haugh RSPB (Lanarkshire) on 4th–23rd Sept (with nearby in Sept an obliging juv **White-winged Black Tern** on the River Clyde near Lamington on 14th–19th). Two **Snowy Owls** remained in the period on Lewis and North Uist (both Outer Hebrides), the Lewis bird at least still present in the second week of Nov. The two over-summering **Common Cranes** were in the Loch Scarmclate area (Caithness) up to 22nd Sept at least with possibly the same two birds then at the Eden Estuary (Fife) on 1st Oct.

It was one of the best autumns ever in Scotland for American waders including unprecedented numbers of **White-rumped Sandpipers**, with North Ronaldsay (Orkney) responsible on its own for a remarkable series of records. Initially three birds (two adults and a juv) were seen there on 12th–23rd Sept with then in Oct a record seven birds (all juveniles including six in one flock) were seen on 13th. At least another 15 birds were reported from elsewhere in Oct including four at Loch Ordais, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 12th, three at The Range, South Uist on 16th and two at Loch Paible, North Uist on 8th–10th (all Outer Hebrides). In Sept, at least 27 **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were seen including 5 at Bornish, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 1st–3rd with 4 seen there on the 18th,

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American Golden Plover, Lewis *(Martin Scott)*

at least. 12 **American Golden Plovers** were reported in the period as were up to 20 **Pectoral Sandpipers** and six **Lesser Yellowlegs** on Shetland, Outer Hebrides (3) and Argyll (2). A **Long-billed Dowitcher** was on Islay (Argyll) on 28th Oct with a **Baird's Sandpiper** also seen at Loch Gruinart in Sept and two further Baird's on the Outer Hebrides, on Lewis in Sept and Barra in Oct. A 1st-winter **Wilson's Phalarope** at Ardvule Point, South Uist on 19th–23rd Sept was the first record for the Outer Hebrides whilst an **Upland Sandpiper** on Benbecula on 3rd–6th Oct was the second Outer Hebrides record. A juv **Semipalmated Sandpiper** at Grutness (Shetland) on 1st–6th Nov rounded off an epic showing.

A drake **Ferruginous Duck** was picked out amongst the Pochard flock at Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross) on 7th–8th Sept, four different **Ring-necked Ducks** were seen on the Outer Hebrides during Oct, the drake **American Wigeon** was back at Wick (Caithness) from 20th Sept and five drake **Green-winged Teals** were reported from 27th Oct in Caithness, Perth & Kinross, Outer Hebrides, Argyll and Shetland. Seven **Surf Scoters** in the period came from Outer Hebrides (2), Moray & Nairn (3), Fife (2) and Angus, four **King Eiders** were on Shetland (2), Moray & Nairn and North-East Scotland, at least three **Snow Geese** (two blue morphs and one white morph) were amongst the Pink-feet in Moray & Nairn, North-East Scotland and Angus from the 18th Sept, and up to 16 presumed vagrant **Canada Geese** were noted from the 25th Sept, including at least six on Islay (Argyll). Birds of the type *interior, parvipes, hutchinsii* and *taverneri* were all reported amongst these 16, the last two forms now of course part of a separate species i.e. Lesser or Cackling Canada Goose.

Snow Goose, North-East Scotland *(Harry Scott)*

An ad **White-billed Diver** returned to Kirkabister, South Nesting (Shetland) on 25th Oct, 11 **Great Shearwaters** were reported in Sept including eight past the Butt of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on the 23rd with in Oct a late bird seen from the Barra–Tiree ferry on 20th. Nine **Cory's Shearwaters** were logged in Sept including singles past Fife Ness (Fife) on the 9th, 10th and 11th, and large numbers of **Sooty Shearwaters** were seen in the North Sea at the start Sept including on the 10th 340 past Peterhead and 250 past Collieston (both Aberdeenshire) with then on the Outer Hebrides 371 counted past Labost, Lewis on 14th Sept. As in August, two **Little Shearwaters** were reported in Sept:, past Fife Ness on 7th and Iona (Argyll) on 23rd. Very good numbers of **Grey Phalaropes** were seen, 85+ being reported in the period mostly from Argyll and the Outer Hebrides. Around 30 **Sabine's Gulls** were seen including six past the Butt of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 23rd Sept and a late juv past Fair Isle on 12th Nov. At least six **Ring-billed Gulls** were reported whilst in the first week of Nov, five **Laughing Gulls** were noted, these part of a record

Laughing Gull, Lewis *(Martin Scott)*

influx into Britain following on from Hurricane Wilma. All five Scottish birds were found between the 7th–9th Nov: on Tiree and Islay (third–fourth Argyll records), two different adults on Lewis and one on Fetlar (Shetland).

Angus Murray

The above is mainly based on records reported to Birdline Scotland though special thanks for additional summaries to Deryk Shaw (Fair Isle), Eric Meek (Orkney) and John Bowler (Tiree).

ISBN 0268-3199

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland.

www.the-soc.org.uk

Passwords to access members' web pages on the new SOC web site:
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